UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

CHARACTERISTICS OF EXEMPLARY TEACHERS MAINSTREAMING SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS INTO REGULAR CLASSROOMS

BY

BEVERLEY E. CROSSMAN

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF EDUCATION**

IN

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled **"Characteristics of Exemplary Teachers Mainstreaming Special Needs Students into Regular Classrooms,"** submitted by **Beverley E. Crossman** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF EDUCATION** IN **EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION**.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the characteristics of exemplary teachers mainstreaming mild to moderate learning disabled students into regular classrooms so that the students experience social, emotional and academic success. A qualitative study was undertaken. Observations, semi-structured interviews and narrative exchanges with five exemplary teachers, who were nominated by peers, were used to determine the essence of exemplary teaching while mainstreaming students with mild to moderate learning disabilities into regular classrooms.

By combining two methods of analysis, grounded theory and a phenomenological approach, the framework as well as the rich description of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms, was realized. In addition, references to educational literature, quotations, and poetry were used to accentuate the findings of the research.

The study reveals that exemplary teachers believe that education, school, teaching, students as people, and the student-teacher relationship are all important to fostering a positive educational experience. The participants in this study share similar qualities, adapt programming to meet individual needs, model appropriate learning and behavior strategies, and empower students to assume responsibility for their own learning and actions. In addition, these teachers build partnerships with their students and affirm successes along the way.

Furthermore, the exemplary teachers in this study employ subtle "human touches" which helps to define them as exemplary. They believe that every child is worthy of a quality educational experience and that all students can learn and grow to meet their full potential. It is a combination of these many variables that help define characteristics of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms.

A DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to teachers who believe that all children are worthy of a quality educational experience and who are committed to doing, to the best of their ability, what is best for children.

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Chapter 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF EXEMPLARY TEACHERS MAINSTREAMING SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS INTO REGUAL CLASSROOMS

Chapter Introduction

Recently, inclusion of special needs children into regular classrooms has been emphasized in programming for students with individual differences. Fundamental to the philosophy of inclusion, is that all children have a right to be integrated in a regular classroom in order that they experience the "least restrictive environment." Gloeckler and Simpson (1988) pointed out that the emphasis on programming for individual differences is that "exceptional students are to be assigned to the least restrictive environment [and] to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children ... are to be educated with children who are not handicapped" (p.5).

As Speidel (1989) indicated, this shift towards inclusive education in Canada has been influenced by American Public Law 94-142 guaranteeing free and appropriate education to all handicapped children and youth. "The legislation was designed to ensure the civil rights of all American children including those who were handicapped to be educated in the least restrictive environment" (p. 15). From 1977 to the present time, the American education system has been dedicated to implementing American federal legislation mandating free and appropriate public education for all children in the least

restrictive environment (Speidel, 1989, pp. 13-14).

In addition to the societal pressures for mainstreaming students with special needs are dramatic economic factors.

> The increased implementation of mainstreaming occurring during educational funding cutbacks appears to be a reality for some school districts ... It appears that mainstreaming has increasingly been implemented to cope with the lack of funds available to maintain specialized programs [therefore] handicapped children have been placed in regular classrooms. (Speidel, 1989, p. 20)

Although the notion of inclusive education has merit, integrating special needs children into regular classrooms is a very complex and difficult task. It seems that there has been an assumption made that all regular classroom teachers are willing and able to teach special needs children. Although there are those teachers who welcome all students, handicapped, average, gifted alike, and offer excellent programming to meet their individual needs, there are many teachers who do not feel comfortable teaching students with disabilities. Therefore, the focus of this research was to identify the characteristics of exemplary teachers mainstreaming students with mild to moderate learning disorders into regular classrooms, and to determine just what it is they do that enables them to do such effective work with these

special students.

Every profession has individuals who stand out as exemplary. Perry (1994) for example, completed a doctoral dissertation identifying characteristics of exceptional nursing practice. Although her research study cannot be replicated in its entirety, this research study will be closely patterned after the work done by Perry.

Identification of the Problem

Clearly, the classroom teacher is a catalyst in the success or failure of the program offered in his or her classroom. Many teachers are very capable and offer excellent programming to regular students in the regular classroom. However, when many of these capable teachers are asked to include special needs children in their classrooms, they may not experience the same level of success. Therefore, the question asked here is: What are the characteristics of exemplary teachers who successfully integrate students with mild to moderate learning disabilities into regular classrooms so that the special needs students experience positive social, emotional, and academic growth?

Definitions of Terms

Three terms that are important to understanding this study require definition. These are (a) exemplary teachers, (b) mild to moderate

disabilities, and (c) regular classrooms.

For the purpose of this study, an exemplary teacher is one nominated by peers as the teacher they would want to have teaching their mild to moderate learning disabled child if they had a child with such a learning problem.

Mild to moderate learning disabled students are those with severe delays in academic functioning which are not directly related to mental handicap, poor fluency in English, or lack of English reading and writing ability, but whose achievement scores, based on a battery of tests given by a large urban school district in western Canada, are below the 5th percentile in three or more of the following areas: reading comprehension, reading decoding or reading vocabulary, spelling, mathematical computation, mathematical applications (e.g., concepts or problem solving), and written language.

Regular classrooms are those classrooms which are not segregated for specific instructional programming such as life skills instruction, remediation, or academic challenge programming for gifted students.

Sub-Statements of the Problem

Within the teaching profession, as in most disciplines, there are those individuals who are recognized by administration, peers, and clients as being exceptional. Perry (1994) recognized the characteristics of exemplary

nurses. Her doctoral dissertation centered on the broad question: "What is the nature of exceptionally competent nursing practice?" (p.1). To ascertain even a partial answer to this general question, she identified three more specific sub-questions for investigation. These sub-questions, like the broad question, can apply to the study of the nature of the exceptionally competent teaching practice. The adapted sub-questions are:

1. What do these exemplary teachers believe about education, teaching, students as people, the school setting, and the student-teacher relationship?
2. What actions and interactions do these exemplary teachers use when teaching?
3. What are the effects of these actions and interactions?

It is the answers to these questions that was the focus of the semi-structured interview format (see Appendix A). The flow of the conversation was determined by asking questions that directed the participants' attention to the themes addressed in the sub-questions. This added to the rich description of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms.

Beliefs and Biases

It was necessary to articulate many of my beliefs about teaching and about teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular

classrooms. By doing so I was reminded of many of my beliefs and became aware of many of my biases. As a result I did not to let them distort, to the best of my ability, observations of subjects or analysis of the data.

After fifteen years of teaching experience in regular and special education settings at various grade levels, I have come to realize many things about the teaching profession. For example, many capable teachers will share similar characteristics to those of exemplary teachers integrating special needs students into the regular classroom. These characteristics affect the quality of their teaching performance. My beliefs and biases fall into four categories:

1. Many competent teachers believe that education is important for everyone, and that everyone is entitled to a quality education. Furthermore, the type of education is determined by individual needs. These exemplary teachers are dedicated to their students and view their jobs as an extremely important part of their lives. Exemplary teachers view teaching as a complex and challenging task that requires specialized training and on going professional development.

2. In addition, many competent teachers believe that all students are capable of learning and that all students have the right to the "least restrictive" learning environment. They believe that all students need individualized attention, and that many of these needs can be met in a regular classroom.

3. Very competent teachers will take extra time to assist students

experiencing difficulties, demonstrate respect for all students, and treat all students equitably. These exemplary teachers will ensure that they communicate regularly with the special needs students and their families.

4. A further belief shared by many excellent teachers is that all students with mild to moderate learning problems will respond positively to individualized attention and all exemplary teachers and special needs students will be able to work together in any situation. In addition, these teachers believe that all students will be happy in regular classrooms.

Having identified these beliefs and biases, I will describe in the method section techniques that were used to overcome, as much as possible, the effects of these biases. The method section will follow the review of the literature.

Contributions to Theory and Practice

Although integrating students with mild to moderate learning disabilities into regular classrooms can be a difficult task, many special needs students are mainstreamed successfully; others are not. To successfully mainstream more special needs students into regular classrooms, research must be done to identify characteristics of exemplary teachers.

This research has the potential to contribute information about the qualities of exemplary teachers mainstreaming students with mild to moderate learning problems into regular classrooms. As a result, teachers

may be able to draw ideas to increase personal awareness and to improve the effectiveness of their teaching. As Perry (1994) pointed out, research such as this may help others to understand more fully what it means to live in this world (p. 6).

By utilizing qualitative measures, this study has potential to contribute to theory and practice. In order to best use the information about the characteristics of exceptional teachers identified in this study, exemplary teachers were given the opportunity to tell their stories. By doing so, we may gain valuable insights into exemplary teaching practice. Their meaningful experiences can contribute to educational theory by sensitizing teachers, administrators, and educational researchers to the value of teacher qualities as an extremely important variable to successful inclusive education.

This study produced usable results with some generalizability to teachers integrating mild to moderate learning disabled students into regular classrooms, not the least of which will be other exemplary teachers. At a minimum, some grounded theory emerged.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter One introduces the research. The problem is stated and the relevant terms are defined. Beliefs and biases are identified and contributions to theory and practice are highlighted. The second chapter reviews the literature with emphasis on the characteristics of effective

teaching and the teacher's role in an inclusive classroom. Chapter Three is a description of the method of the study. This section recounts how participants were selected and describes the pilot study. In addition, the manner in which data were gathered and analyzed is presented. A section about the trustworthiness of the data is included as well as acknowledgments of delimitations and limitations of the study. The fourth chapter presents the findings and results following a grounded theory approach while the fifth chapter presents insights resulting from a phenomenological framework. Chapter Six includes concluding insights, questions for further research, summary statement, and personal reflections and concerns.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Chapter Introduction

There is a wealth of information in educational literature regarding inclusive education. One way to define inclusion is a "policy/practice in which all students … receive their total education within the regular education classroom in their home school" (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 1993, p. 63). Although not all schools embrace the notion of inclusive education, it appears to be "the wave of the future" NASABE News, 1992, p. 54). Everywhere one looks, one finds arguments for integration. The fundamental premise of the arguments, is the students' right to, and need for, an educational experience in a "regular" class.

> [What a growing number of] schools have in common is an attempt to develop educational settings into inclusive, supportive communities. The goal in such schools is to be sure that all students, regardless of any individual differences they might have … are fully included in the mainstream of school life. (Stainback & Stainback, 1992, p. 29)

This chapter examines the literature concerning effective teaching and the documentation pertaining to the role of the teacher in the inclusive classroom. When coupled with the research findings presented in Chapters

Four and Five, a dramatic and detailed portrait of an exemplary teacher mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms emerges.

Effective Teaching

Henry Adams once wrote "A teacher affects eternity.

He can never tell where his influence stops.

(Jackson, 1986, p. 53)

Many educational researchers agree that effective teaching is an elusive skill that is not easy to define or to measure (Demmon-Berger, 1986, p. 2). Jackson (1986) in his book "The Practice of Teaching", described an experience he had as a principal in an elementary school. "As I moved from one room to another I saw with my own eyes teachers teaching and I did not for a moment doubt my judgment" (p. 78). He was trying to interpret effective teaching, however he found it difficult to do, simply because he had no clear definition of what effective teaching was. "Teaching was what I was witnessing, no doubt about it. One would have had to have been blind not to see it" (p. 78). But were those teachers demonstrating effective teaching skills and strategies?

Over the years, researchers have conducted thousands of studies to identify and analyze effective and ineffective teaching. The results

> are, to put it bluntly, confusing and contradictory. Often, the research findings, seem simply to confirm the obvious … a friendly teacher is an effective teacher … But this much is clear: Teaching is a complex act - both an art and a science. (Ornstein, 1993, p. 24)

Some educational researchers have tried to define effective teaching. Cruickshank (1986) for example, defined an effective teacher as one who is judged by significant others, pupils, parents, colleagues, administrators, and the public at large, as meeting their needs. He pointed out, however, that "perceptions of what constitutes teacher effectiveness may differ from one group to another" (p. 83).

Yet, definitions about effective teaching do not take into account what Ornstein (1993) referred to as the "human element."

> These definitions tend to overlook the friendly, warm, democratic teacher … the creative teacher who is stimulating and imaginative, the dramatic teacher who bubbles with energy and enthusiasm, the philosophical teacher who encourages students to play with ideas and concepts, and the problem-solving teacher who requires that students think out answers to questions. (pp. 25-26)

Inventories have been complied in an attempt to define effective teaching. Paul Beisenherz (1990) wrote that "many schools have teachers

who possess qualities that make them stand out from their colleagues. They have a vision of what successful teaching should accomplish, and they have confidence and motivation to achieve their objectives" (p. 36). He went on to the index certain distinctive attitudes and behaviors that define these teachers as effective. His list included:

1. They take risks.
2. They are aware of successful programs and approaches.
3. They "scrounge" a variety of appropriate materials and activities to support student learning.
4. They perceive teaching as a creative process.
5. They demonstrate enthusiasm in their teaching.
6. They are aware they are modeling a behavior they want to see in their students.
7. They develop feelings of success and self-esteem in their students.
8. They demonstrate leadership and commitment.
9. They beat their own drums. (p. 36)

Cummings (1987) asked the question: "Why are some teachers more effective regardless of the socio-economic background of students, physical environment of the school, amount of money spent per student or even class size?" (p. 1). His tally of effective teaching behaviors and characteristics is very different than the list presented by Beisnherz. His list included: (a) high

expectations for achievement; (b) accept only the best effort of students; (c) believe that all students can learn; (d) believe in a warm, supportive climate; (e) exhibit positive attitude toward pupils; (f) provide more time on task; (g) have an orderly, structured atmosphere; (h) spend more time in active teaching; and (I) use a wide range of instructional strategies (p. 1). Wong and Wong (1991), on the other hand, listed only three characteristics they believe are crucial to effective teaching. They suggested that a very competent teacher (a) has positive expectations for student success, (b) is an extremely good classroom manager, and (c) knows how to design lessons for student mastery (p. 7).

Hawryluk (1986) reviewed literature relating to the effective classroom teacher, but was not able to put together a definitive catalogue of personal characteristics or clusters of characteristics which contribute to effective teaching.

> The search for a list of personal characteristics that effective teachers would possess did not yield the expected results. Effective teachers often possessed qualities that were different, sometimes even opposite, to one another ... the list ... by which a potentially effective teacher could be selected never became a reality. (p. 10)

He did suggest, however, that some characteristics stand out as likely candidates for effective teaching. He mentioned the following: (a)

businesslike, (b) "withitness," (c) clarity, (d) enthusiasm, (e) consistency, (f) acceptance, (g) self-efficacy, and (h) flexibility (pp. 7-10).

Other characteristics of effective teaching have been noted by a variety of educational researchers. For example, Purkey and Smith (1982) suggested that effective teachers believe that all students can reach their full potential (p. 68), while Billups and Rauth (1984) maintained that effective teachers treat all students with respect and dignity (p. 38). Demmon-Berger (1986) argued that effective teachers demonstrate empathy and warmth by showing respect for students. She went on to add that effective teachers are aware of, and accepting of students' thoughts and feelings and are able to understand the reality of each perspective. Furthermore, effective teachers are student-centered and their concern is more for the student than for the subject (p. 12). Goodlad (1984) added that effective teachers are deeply committed to their work and to their students. They enjoy what they do and derive rewards from their work (p. 159).

Clearly, teachers experiencing success mainstreaming special needs students into regular classes, demonstrate many of the characteristics and behaviors mentioned. Wong, Kauffman, and Lloyd (1993), based on research by a number of educational researchers listed 20 behaviors and attitudes characterizing effective teachers of mainstreamed students. They included:

1. Positive academic performance expectations for students
2. Frequent monitoring and checking of student work.

3. Clarity.
4. Flexibility (adapts as necessary).
5. Fairness (lack of favoritism).
6. Active involvement with students.
7. Responsiveness.
8. Good relationship with students; receptive to students' approaches.
9. Patience.
10. Humor.
11. Structured and predictable.
12. Sets and maintains contingencies for student directed activities.
13. Firmness.
14. Knowledge of different types of appropriate behavioral interventions.
15. Positive attitude towards mainstreaming.
16. Knowledge and/or willingness to learn about working with students with special needs.
17. Willingness to work with special education specialist.
18. Perceives self as competent teacher.
19. High sense of professional responsibility and involvement.
20. High professional job satisfaction. (p. 25)

Many educational researchers suggest that the single most important variable for successful mainstreaming is the attitude of classroom teachers (Amundson, 1993; Andrews & Lupart, 1993; Arthur-Boswell, 1995; Cox,

1994; Hackman, 1993). Harbin (1992) pointed out that integration can be legislated, but attitude cannot (p. 15). Not all teachers feel comfortable teaching students with special needs. There will be many teachers who will view integration of exceptional children as an intrusion and a burden they would rather do without. "A teacher who has a positive attitude about working with special needs students provides a different experience for those children, non-handicapped peers, and staff than does a teacher who is hesitant to work with the handicapped" (Iriye, 1989, p. 30).

Lieberman (1985) maintained that we cannot "drag regular educators kicking and screaming into a merger with special education. The daily evidence on mainstreaming attitudes is too overwhelming" (p. 513) to suggest that all regular classroom teachers are capable or willing to integrate special needs students into their classrooms.

Arthur-Boswell (1995) investigated the validity of the assumption that educators would positively embrace the policy of educating special needs students in the regular classroom. He concluded that "in order for inclusion to succeed, those who work with inclusion children must have some desire to do so. The strongest elements of this study point to the willingness of teachers to try, that the attitudes ... have an impact on the success of the program" (p. 24).

In the opinion of fools it is a humble task,

but in fact

is the noblest of occupations.

Erasmus

Role of the Teacher in an Inclusive Classroom

One cannot argue against the importance of the role the teacher plays in education. Wong, Kauffman, and Lloyd (1993) pointed to the teacher as the cornerstone of the program, be it integrated or segregated, and as the main catalyst for the success or failure of that program (p. 22). Speidel (1989) noted that individuals further away from the actualities of mainstreaming than the regular teachers, have decided inclusion is desirable, but leave the details to be worked out by the teachers who will implement the program. "The responsibility of the regular classroom teacher is significant" (p. 23).

Andrews and Lupart (1993) suggest that if integration is to be successful, many conditions must be met.

> To ensure that children gain personal satisfaction in their educational experiences, and are provided with the foundation for life-long learning, requires an integrated and flexible educational process. It involves not only appropriate service delivery, but also dedicated

people who are involved in the child's day-to-day life, and who strive to make the child's experiences as full and enjoyable as possible. It requires teachers to be understanding, empathetic, and knowledgeable about students' cognitive, developmental, and cultural needs as well as to be energetic and creative with respect to program planning and instruction. (p. 9)

Of major concern regarding the mainstreaming of special needs students into regular classrooms is the ability of regular classroom teachers to meet the individual needs of those students. Vaughn, Schumm, and Kouzekanani (1993) pointed out that constraints such as class size, pressure for content coverage, and lack of planning time can prevent teachers from making accommodations for individual student needs (p. 545).

Despite the limitations, teachers are asked to do more than ever before. In addressing the needs of regular and exceptional students, teachers, with assistance from principals and other school personnel, face many challenges. These include:

1. To improve the quality of education.
2. To meet individual needs.
3. To determine accurately the least restrictive environment for each exceptional student.
4. To provide adequate resource services.

5. To establish optimal learning environments.
6. To determine the parameters of intervention for exceptional students and individual learners in the regular class setting.
7. To identify the knowledge, methods, and attitudes that constitute the competencies of excellence in teaching and to establish procedures for imparting and encouraging them in teachers' professional lives.
8. To support developing positive attitudes among regular educators and other school personnel toward exceptional students.
9. To improve relationships with parents. (Gloecker & Simpson, 1988, p. 11)

Glasser (1990) suggested that the role of the teacher in the inclusive classroom is to convince not half or three quarters, but essentially all of his or her students, special needs students included, to do quality work in school. "This means to work up to their capacity, not to 'lean on their shovels' as so many are doing now" (p. 14). This is accomplished by providing appropriate programming that meets individual needs and capabilities. Research shows that teachers mainstreaming special needs students use a repertoire of techniques to ensure that they are adapting programming so that all students learn. These may include individualized educational plans, simulations, cooperative learning, role playing, student directed learning, teacher directed

learning, individualized instruction, and active monitoring during seatwork (Demmon-Berger, 1986, p. 10).

Burden and Byrd (1994) pointed out that students should be actively involved in the learning process (p. 266). They referred to studies completed at the Center for Early Adolescence that suggested that primary-age and adolescent children require particular emphasis on active participation. The research indicated that students should be (a) actively engaged in manipulating materials and objects, (b) working in small groups, and (c) asking questions of each other as well as the teacher (p. 266). In addition to ensuring that students are actively involved in their own learning, teachers must ensure that the activities relate to the students' worlds. "A number of studies on motivation substantiate ... that individuals will be more highly motivated to achieve if they can be shown how their efforts relate to their everyday lives" (Burden & Byrd, 1994, p. 266).

Another important role of a teacher in an inclusive classroom, is to adapt programming to meet individual needs. There are those who have suggested that if students with special needs are to achieve success in an inclusionary environment, instructional adaptations are required to ensure developmentally appropriate programs are in place (Lewis & Doorlag, 1991; Boyer & Bandy, 1994). Hawkins, Doueck, and Lishner (1988) stated that implementing adapted instructional practices in mainstream classes, provided greater opportunity for involvement, learning and success for low-achieving

students. This, they believe, is a preferable alternative to pull out approaches (p. 34).

> Teachers who are most successful with students with special needs are those who realize that all students have their own strengths and needs and who respect the unique contributions that all students bring to the learning environment. Teachers who recognize these attributes realize that by accommodating students with special needs in the regular classroom, they are providing all students with the opportunity to be a part of a community that values diversity and the unique contributions of all. (Special Education Council of Alberta Teachers' Association, 1994, p. 7)

Tomic (1994) argued that classroom teachers are "the crucial factor in increasing knowledge, skills, and insights ... they have a central position in the classroom learning process, play a directive and active role and decide the daily classroom routine" (pp. 254-255). Charles and Senter (1995) pointed out that, in the past, many educators believed that it was the responsibility of students to make choices that brought success, but it is now apparent that the school and the teacher must meet the students' needs which determines the success or failure of the program (p. 127).

Teachers have a responsibility to get to know all students so that teachers can better relate to the students and therefore meet their needs. As

one student pointed out, "A good teacher is one who understands your problems, who is nice, doesn't put stress on you, who cares about you, and who knows and understands your needs" (Hoyano & Johnson, 1994, p. 43). Respecting individual needs is also important. Teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms cannot expect to experience success if they do not recognize the individual.

> Teachers develop good personal relationships with their pupils by fostering mutual trust and respect. To do this effectively teachers need to be aware of each child as an individual and be sensitive to the mood of the class as a whole. This means knowing who's who and keeping track of what's going on. (Smith & Laslett, 1993, p. 10)

Classroom management is the teacher's responsibility. Martin and Sugarman (1993) suggested that a very important teacher variable is "withitness". "Withitness" refers to a teacher's behaviors that demonstrate knowledge of what is happening in the classroom. "More precisely … withitness is defined as a teacher communicating to the children by his actual behavior that he knows what the children are doing" (p. 55).

Jackson (1986) suggested that another important function of the teacher is to be a role model for the students in the classroom.

> For it is essential to the success of the [program] that teachers …

> personify the very quality they seek to engender in their students. To the best of their ability they must be living exemplars of certain virtues or values or attitudes … [because] most teachers already know that no attitude, interest, or value can be taught except by the teacher who himself or herself believes in, cares for, or cherishes whatever it is that he or she holds out for emulation. (p. 124)

He based this observation on a study undertaken by a former student. Kuehnle (1984) distributed questionnaires to 150 friends and neighbors asking them to write a paragraph or two about the teachers they remembered most vividly. "The results were striking. Not only did most respondents comply enthusiastically with the request, their descriptions yielded literally scores of [examples of effective teaching]" (Jackson, 1986, p. 123). One example follows:

> He moved the learning process from himself to us and equipped us to study independently. We were able to see such mundane concepts as money supply, price mechanism, supply and demand, all around us. We became interested. We actually talked economics after class! In Eckstein's class I became aware that I was there to evaluate, not ingest, concepts. I began to discriminate … (p. 123)

"Excellence in teaching is caring about students, understanding them

and attempting to bring about needed learning in each student" (White, 1991, p. 94). Goodlad (1984) argued that teachers constitute the single most important element of schooling that has the greatest impact on students' learning and he went on to explain that able teachers do make an important difference in students' learning (p. 167).

> Arguably, the role of a teacher is a difficult and complex one. In analyzing the components of effective instruction, the popular refrain - "good teachers are not born, they are made" - is often heard. The truth in this rather simple statement echoes in schoolrooms across the country. Wanting to be a successful teacher is not enough, nor is love for children. The fact is, instruction is a complex process involving a multitude of interrelated skills as well as these important desires and feeling. For some, the development of effective teaching behaviors does not come easily. For others, the development does not come at all. Truly, everyone is not destined to be a teacher. (Bedwell, Hunt, Touzel, & Wiseman, 1984, p. vii)

Dysart (1986) stated that effective teaching research is but one part of a teacher's information base. "In the final analysis, the translation of that information base into the act of teaching is the personal touch each teacher must apply" (p. 3).

The mediocre teacher tells.

The good teacher explains.

The superior teacher demonstrates.

The great teacher inspires.

(In Peter, 1977, p. 464)

Chapter Summary

Clearly, not all effective teachers demonstrate the same characteristics or use the same teaching techniques. In addition, not all strategies will prove effective with all students, or from one classroom to the next. Furthermore, some findings will be more appropriate at some grade levels than at others. Yet, there are some factors that many researchers have identified as having a positive effect in the classroom. Following an extensive review of the literature, Demmon-Berger (1986) suggested that effective teachers:

1. Tend to be good managers.
2. Use systematic instruction techniques.
3. Have high expectations.
4. Vary teaching strategies.
5. Handle discipline through prevention.
6. Are warm and caring.
7. Are democratic in their approach.
8. Are task-oriented.

9. Are concerned with perceptual meanings rather than facts and events.
10. Are comfortable interacting with students.
11. Are readily accessible to students outside of class.
12. Tailor their teaching to student needs.
13. Are highly flexible, enthusiastic, and imaginative.
14. Believe in their own efficacy. (p. 4)

Demands placed on "regular" teachers, teaching "regular" students, in a "regular" class are, without a doubt, enormous. To add special needs students to the mix, suggests that the teachers' assignments will become more complex and difficult. John Mesinger (1985) believed that not all teachers are capable of such demands. He wrote "... mainstreaming ... what is missing? Teacher qualities! What can the average teacher do?" (p. 511).

Fortunately, not all teachers are "average." Despite the many pitfalls, there are teachers who are doing an exceptional job of mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms. Why? What qualities do those teachers have that enable them to do such extraordinary work with special needs students in their classes? It is the answers to these questions that this research sought to address. The answers to these questions are presented in Chapters Four and Five. It is here that the qualities of exemplary teachers are discovered and the stories of five exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs children are told.

In the eyes of teachers, the classroom can be seen

as a group of musicians, masterfully guided

by a conductor,

who manages all the aspects

of each individual or group performance.

During large group time,

all the "players"

work together to create a wonderful

performance for their own enjoyment of learning.

... During individual or small group time,

each player continues to practice diligently

in order to improve his or her quality of performance.

Some players may take more time

in order to reach the desired sound quality,

[but] each player makes a unique contribution.

... There is a rich variety of sounds.

(Geddert, 1992, p. 1)

Chapter 3

Research Design and Method of the Study

Chapter Introduction

The focus of this study was to identify the characteristics of exemplary teachers who successfully integrate students with mild to moderate learning disabilities into regular classrooms. To obtain the full description of the essence of teaching special needs students in a regular classroom setting, a qualitative research design was chosen. A combination of a grounded theory analysis and a phenomenological approach are the methodologies best suited for this research. Following Perry's (1994) example, I entered the participants' environments to gather first-hand information through observations, interviews, and written accounts.

Research Design

This chapter will focus on (a) the participants, (b) the pilot study, (c) gathering of the data, (d) data analysis techniques, (e) data trustworthiness, and (f) delimitations and limitations of the study.

Participants. The target population for this study, was teachers integrating students with mild to moderate learning problems into regular classrooms in Canadian schools having inclusion policies. The goal was to

locate teachers in a large urban school district in western Canada, who were considered by their peers, to be exemplary teachers integrating students with mild to moderate learning disabilities into their regular classrooms. The principal and three teachers in twelve schools using the inclusive education model were sent a letter (see Appendix B), and asked to nominate peers whom they believe are exemplary. An additional principal, who was on leave from the school district, but who had worked in personnel at central office and was aware of exemplary teachers throughout the district, was also asked to complete a nomination form. They were asked to consider teachers at all schools in the district when making nominations and to nominate one or two teachers they believe were exemplary. These teachers were considered the accessible population. Following Perry's (1994) example, to clarify what is meant by "exemplary," principals and teachers were asked to consider those teachers they would want to have teaching their mild to moderate learning disabled child, if they had a child with such a learning problem. The written, confidential nominations were collected by the principals (see Appendix C) and mailed to me in self-addressed, stamped envelopes. The names were ranked in order according to the number of nominations. Starting from the top of the list, participants were solicited until four teachers were identified as the main study participants.

In total, 12 principals, one of whom was on leave from the district responded. In nine of the schools responses were received from the principal and two or three teachers. Two schools returned principal nominations only.

Most forms included two nominations, while some indicated only one exemplary teacher. Two forms listed three choices for exemplary teaching. A total of 36 forms were completed nominating 66 teachers.

Not all teachers nominated, who were approached, agreed to participate in the study. Two teachers, at or near the top of the list, did not wish to be included in the study. The first teacher to decline did so because she felt that she was not exemplary. She suggested that she was managing day to day, in terms of meeting the needs of her special students. She explained that she was offering appropriate programming for her special needs students, allowing them opportunity for success, and making them feel apart of the regular class, but felt she was only coping. She maintained that the reason why so many had nominated her as exemplary, was the criterion: Who would you want to have teaching your special needs student if you had one? "I maintain a warm and caring classroom, where children feel safe and loved. Parents want that kind of environment for their children, special or not, that is most likely why I was nominated by so many." Although I suggested that this might very well be a characteristic of an exemplary teacher, she did not feel comfortable and declined the invitation to participate. The second teacher who declined participation in the study did so because of health related reasons.

The names of other teachers who were nominated, but not selected for the study, were kept in reserve. All teachers interested in participating in the study were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix C) after they had

been apprised of what was expected of them for participation in the study.

Pilot Study. A two-step pilot study was undertaken. The first step involved testing and practicing the semi-structured interview format with a teacher who did not participate in the study. She was asked to critique the interview style and one change was made to the wording of one question before the actual study began.

The second step involved observing, interviewing and participating in narrative exchanges with one teacher considered to be exemplary at integrating special needs students into a regular classroom. Observations for the pilot study were conducted over a period of approximately eight hours. The observations took place once a week, on four separate days, alternating between mornings and afternoons during the period beginning February 16 to March 5, 1996. A formal interview was conducted enhancing the data collected during observations and the many informal conversations that we had during my visits. Additionally, the participant completed two narrative exchanges.

Although no major short comings were identified, it was clear that observations done on the first day were not as detailed as observations done on the fourth day. Practice was key.

The pilot study participant was chosen by following, as closely as possible, the criteria established for selecting the main study participants. First of all he was considered by peers, to be exemplary at mainstreaming

special needs students into regular classrooms. Secondly, one of his former principals was contacted who also agreed that this teacher was exemplary. Finally, I was aware that a colleague had requested that his child, who was experiencing academic difficulty, be placed in the pilot study participant's classroom. I contacted this teacher personally, and after the assignment was explained to him, he agreed to participate in the pilot study.

In addition, the teacher selected to critique the interview process was considered by colleagues, to be exceptional at integrating special needs students into a regular classroom. This teacher has had leadership experience and has been involved in the interviewing process. When the assignment was explained to her, she indicated that she would be happy to help although she recognized that her role would be limited within the scope of the study.

Data Gathering. As Perry demonstrated, the exploration of the nature of nursing practice requires close contact with the participants, therefore data collection must happen in the participants' worlds. (p.42) Heeding Perry's advice, a combination of field-based methods including observation, semi-structured interviews, and narrative exchanges was used to ensure that a comprehensive view of exceptional teaching was obtained.

Each teacher was studied individually and observations with every participant were conducted over a period of approximately eight to ten hours. Observations for the main study totaled a period of approximately 34 hours

and took place on 16 separate days in April and May 1996. With the exception of one teacher, each teacher was observed for half a day each day for four days during a one week span. Due to scheduling and a field trip, the final observation was completed the following week for that teacher. The visits alternated between morning and afternoon to ensure that a wide variety of teaching situations and interactions were observed. This allowed the researcher to observe the teaching world as the teachers experienced it.

A formal semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant during the time most convenient for the teacher. All interviews were done at the school either before class, during the lunch break or during preparatory time. Clusters of questions were asked to address themes identified in the sub-statements of the problem mentioned in Chapter One. This semi-structured approach fostered a detailed account of exceptional teaching and when coupled with the wealth of information obtained during the many informal conversations, contributed to the rich description of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms.

Participants were also asked to write about one or two extraordinary teaching moments. Following Perry's (1994) example, I wrote about two personal teaching moments to share with participants, to inspire them to write about their own memorable teaching moments about a special needs student they remember most vividly, a particular moment that was important or satisfying, or an incident that changed them or their teaching. The first personal teaching moment I shared with participants follows.

Michael's Moment

Michael walked into his new grade four classroom, in his new school, slammed his book bag down on his desk, and looked at me with hatred in his eyes. He had never met me before, but it was apparent Michael was an angry boy, with little or no respect for school. "I'm here because I have to be, but I don't have to like it," was Michael's message.

Michael had been identified the spring before, as a "special education" student, with mild learning problems. His parents, with encouragement from Michael's former principal and teacher, had requested a new school with the hope that Michael would receive the necessary help with his learning problems. They also hoped that Michael would learn to cope with his anger, which would allow him to make more appropriate choices when dealing with frustration. Michael had been in a regular grade three class the year before, where he simply could not keep up. There was no evidence that his program had been adapted to meet his needs, but there was ample documentation of behavior problems such as swearing, throwing books and chairs, as well as one occasion when he bit his former teacher. Clearly, Michael was frustrated with his inabilities and the demands placed upon him.

In the beginning, Michael was suspicious of my actions and

intentions. He was uncooperative with me, the program aide, and peers alike. He resisted school work, including art, saying "I can't do it. I'm no good." He began to make adjustments, however, when he realized that my expectations were reasonable, and he quickly recognized that he was capable of completing his assignments successfully. The work he was given was at his level. Over night, this angry, uncooperative boy became a hard working, happy, confident student.

Michael was always the first student to arrive in the morning. At first, Michael would walk past me without a glance, never responding to my "good morning" message to him. In addition, he was always the first to leave at "home time." He would grab his homework, shove it into his bag, and leave the room without a glance in my direction. Slowly, this changed. As Michael became more trusting and comfortable, he would stop at my desk as he entered the classroom in the morning, and share a story about his soccer game, his twin sisters, or his visit to his uncle's farm. He would remember to say good morning to the program aide, and was more cooperative with his peers. He began saying "good-bye" to us at the end of the day, even though he continued to be the first to leave each day.

One afternoon, in early October, Michael remained at his desk. He was in no hurry to leave as he took his time gathering his homework, glancing about the room all the while. Clearly, he had

something he wanted to say to me, but he wanted to be alone, When the last student left, Michael got up and walked towards me. As he approached, I noticed tears in his eyes. Suddenly, he ran and threw himself in my arms. As he hugged me, he whispered, "Thank you, Mrs. Crossman. Thanks a lot!" And then he was gone.

I remained standing there for a long time, feeling such emotion. I was angry that Michael had had to wait so long to experience success in school, but I was thrilled that Michael was finally progressing academically, socially, and emotionally. I was also amazed at his dramatic show of emotion. Clearly, Michael was grateful for his new found success.

It should not hurt to be a child! I reaffirmed my commitment, then and there, that no matter what the circumstance I would always do, to the best of my ability, what is best for children.

Data Analysis. The first analysis was provided by the participants themselves who shared their experiences, their memories, reflections, and meaningful insights during observations, semi-structured interviews, and in the written accounts. "We gather other people's experiences because they allow us to become more experienced ourselves" (van Manen, 1990, p. 62).

The point of phenomenological research is to "borrow" other people's experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of

> the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of human experience. (van Manen, 1990, p. 62)

A second analysis was achieved by blending together the written accounts, conversations and field notes, with the literature. The review of literature presented in Chapter Two, as well as the literature that was woven throughout the findings of the study, provide an additional perspective.

A third layer of understanding came through analysis following the "constant comparative method" which included the search for, and connection of the main themes and core variables. Following Strauss and Corbin's (1990) example, I analyzed the data using their three step method (see Chapter Four). I began a line-by-line review of all the field notes, interview transcripts, and written narratives. This process, known as open coding, allowed me to name and categorize phenomena through close examination of data (p. 62). Next, I focused on each category identified in open coding and using the process known as axial coding, I put those data back together in new ways (p. 97). Finally, I engaged in the process known as selective coding. I committed myself to the central phenomenon of my study by way of conceptualization of a descriptive story. "This means, just as with open and axial coding, that the central phenomenon has to be given a name, and as a category, gradually be related to other categories" (p. 120).

A fourth analysis was found in literature, poetry, and other story forms.

As van Manen (1990) pointed out, story (a) provides us with possible human experiences; (b) enables us to experience life situations, feelings, emotions, and events that we would not normally experience: (c) allows us to broaden the horizons of our normal existential landscape by creating possible worlds; (d) appeals to us and involves us in a personal way; (e) is an artistic device that lets us turn back to life as lived, whether fictional or real; and (f) evokes the quality of vividness in detailing unique and particular aspects of a life that could be my life or your life (p. 70). To illustrate, I would like to share with you the second narrative I gave participants in the hope that they would be motivated to write about a notable teaching memory.

The Day That Went From Wrong to Wonderful

There was a loud knock at the classroom door. I was surprised to find Dustin's mother, Yvonne, standing at the door. As soon as she began to speak, it was obvious she had been drinking. I stepped out into the hallway, and closed the door.

"How dare you tell my kid what to do," Yvonne screamed. "I'm his mother and I tell him what to do, not you!"

Dustin had a truancy problem and when it became obvious that there would be no cooperation from his parents I had talked to Dustin about assuming the responsibility for getting himself to school.

"You tell my kid what to do again, and I'll kill you!" she screamed.

For the first time in my many years of teaching, I realized that I was in danger, and I was terrified. As I tried to explain that it was my mandate to ensure all students in my class come to school, Yvonne reacted in a threatening manner. Fortunately, Yvonne's common-law husband who had just taken their daughter to kindergarten had arrived. Eventually, he convinced her to go home.

As she was leaving, Yvonne turned and muttered, "Try it you witch, and you'll be sorry!"

Trembling, I walked down the hallway to the library. I slumped into a chair and sat there. I was shaken. How dare she threaten me! Didn't she realize that I was concerned with doing what was best for Dustin? I began to think that it just wasn't worth it. All the hours, all the effort, and for what? To be threatened because I wanted a ten year old to come to school?

Just then, I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder. There stood Christopher, a former student. Christopher smiled and told me that his teacher had suggested he come and show me his time line that he had done for a social studies project. He pulled up a chair and sat down beside me. Quietly he opened his notebook and carefully unfolded a long sheet of paper that he had been pasted in his book. What I noticed right away was that there were not many events documented. Other than his birth, and the births of his brother and sisters, there was nothing recorded until three quarters of the way along, where he had

written "I met Mrs. Crossman."

I was touched more than words could ever say. I hugged Christopher and I cried. He had saved me. I realized then, that I was, and would always be, a teacher.

van Manen (1990) pointed out that "poetry ... is a literary form that transforms lived experience into poetic language, the poetic language of verse. Poetry allows the expression of the most intense feelings in the most intense form" (pp. 70-71). To illustrate, the following poem has been included.

A special needs child sits warily
at the back of the class.
Waiting.
Forever waiting to be called on
to share his ideas, his beliefs.

As Perry (1994) demonstrated, the data analysis captured and communicated as much as possible, concrete, as well as abstract, unstructured, and non-verbal characteristics of exemplary teachers integrating students with mild to moderate learning problems into regular classes. By employing this multi-layered analysis, qualities of exemplary teachers became more explicit and grounded.

Trustworthiness of the Data and the Analysis. Several actions were taken to ensure trustworthiness of the data and of the data analysis. For example, researcher biases were significantly decreased because the participants were asked to review interview transcripts and field notes prior to the analysis phase. Following each observation or interview, I presented the participants with a copy of the transcripts. They had the opportunity to question entries they did not understand or agree with, add details that were left out, or clear up any misunderstandings. I also had the opportunity to enhance my understanding by sharing views and asking the teachers for clarification. For example, during the fourth observation of the pilot study, when the students were in the computer lab, I had a chance to clarify a concern that I had. This was recorded in the field notes.

> As Mr. Bell works on lesson plans, and as I continue to hang the masks we talk. I ask him if he thinks the students are different when I am in the room. He responds by saying that he really doesn't think so. He believes that they are pretty much the same when I'm not there. I ask if he is different when I am there. His response surprises me. "Maybe. I don't think I am on a conscious level, but maybe sub-consciously I'm different." He does go on to explain that probably he started off differently the first observation visit because he wasn't sure what I was looking for or what I'd be doing. But eventually he became

less focused on me and began to focus on what he should be doing ... "teaching the kids."

Additionally, if a change was made, it was carefully noted. An example of this happened after the same participant read through field notes following the second visit. I had written that all students with mild to moderate learning problems were integrated into regular classes at the school. Mr. Bell pointed out that this in fact was not the case, and that only some special needs students were integrated. He explained that "although including all students in regular classes is a priority at this school, there are a few students, who, for a variety of reasons, cannot be integrated at this time." The change was noted.

Furthermore, attempts were made to provide the data in context to decrease the likelihood of misinterpretation. Tape-recording the interview allowed for word-by-word accuracy in documenting what was said. Triangulating observations, the interview, and the written account strengthened the credibility of the study, suggesting that the common themes highlighted were important. Documentation was done in such a way as to ensure detailed description of the contextual data needed for replication.

Finally, the preliminary analysis of the data of the study was sent to the participants. The teachers were asked to read over the summary and to call me to confirm that the study did, in fact, do what it was intended to do. I spoke with all five participants on the phone, but met with two of participants

to discuss, in greater detail, the outcome of the study. The other participants were happy with the telephone conversations and did not request a meeting. All agreed that the study captured the essence of the exemplary teacher integrating mild to moderate learning disabled students into regular classrooms.

Delimitations and Limitations. This study shares many of the same delimitations and limitations as the work done by Perry (1994). One important delimitation of this study is its focus on teachers mainstreaming mild to moderate learning disabled students into regular classrooms. This may be viewed as a strength, in that it concentrates the research on an in-depth investigation of a particular group. A further delimitation relates to the number of participants. In keeping with a phenomenological study, a small, but workable number of study participants were chosen.

It must also be noted, that I am limited by my ability to perceive and to understand the meaning of the data collected. My analysis is but one way to interpret the data. The reader, however, is invited to go beyond what is analyzed and reported by me, thereby rendering this limitation less consequential.

One limitation that is not similar to Perry's (1994) study pertains to the large number of teachers employed by the district. Not all exemplary teachers would be known to all nominators of this study. Many exemplary teachers may have been overlooked. An assumption was made, however,

that by studying five exemplary teachers, a comprehensive view of exceptional teaching practice would emerge.

Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on the research design. Participant selection was described and an overall description of the two-step pilot study was given. Steps taken to enhance the trustworthiness of the study data were described as were the methods used in data gathering and analysis. A list of the delimitations and limitations of the study were also included.

The following chapters present the findings. Chapter Four provides a structured account of the outcomes as a result of using Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory methodology. Categories and sub-categories are listed as well as the phenomena arrived at by way of axial coding. A conceptualization of the story line about exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms will be given, with emphasis on the core category. Chapter Five highlights the experiences of the five participants. Their stories will be told following the categories and phenomena identified in Chapter Four using a phenomenological approach. As Perry (1994) pointed out, the blending of the two methods strengthens the research. A richer more detailed picture of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students emerged (p. 16).

Chapter 4

Research Findings: A Grounded Theory Approach

Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover and describe the qualities of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms. A qualitative, phenomenological study was chosen. Eichelberger (1989) stated that "phenomenologists use human thinking, feelings, perceiving, and other mental and physiological acts to describe and understand human experiences" (p.5). A phenomenological approach was chosen to describe the qualities of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms, but a different approach was needed to determine what those qualities were. Following Perry (1994), a blending of two methodologies were used. One approach emphasized discovery, the second method emphasized description.

Grounded theory was chosen as the method best suited for discovery. The goal of grounded theory research is to "discover relevant categories and the relationships among them; to put together categories in new, rather than standard ways" to help derive meaning from our human experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 49). Perry (1994) demonstrated that the research findings from grounded theory can be reported at different levels of detail and abstraction. She cited Chentiz and Swanson (1986) who claimed that findings can range from presentation of the theory, to explanation of selected

propositions, to description of a category or concept (p. 249). Perry (1994) went on to explain that according to Swanson (1986) "these reports are valid and are needed as building blocks. From these ... hypotheses may be generated that can lead to the eventual linking of categories and the generation of grounded theory" (p. 249).

> To understand the nature of the human experience we must study that experience itself and not an objective external world. A fundamental assumption is that human experiences can be catalogued and described in order to learn how we get meaning from our experiences. (Eichelberger, 1989, p. 5)

Categories are the link between data and analysis, and are important for the description and initial analysis of qualitative data (Perry, 1994, p. 251). This means that the researcher is able to break down the reams of data collected during a qualitative study and arrange the information into workable units for analysis.

> From the beginning of data collection the qualitative analyst is beginning to decide what things mean, is noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, casual flows, and propositions. The competent researcher holds these conclusions lightly, maintaining openness and skepticism, but the conclusions are still there, inchoate

and vague at first, increasingly explicit and grounded ... (Miles & Huberman, 1986, p. 22)

In order to categorize the data, I found that I needed a very structured approach. I needed a process whereby I could systematically collect and analyze data. As was mentioned in Chapter Three, the structured approach I used was Strauss and Corbin's (1990) three levels of coding: open, axial, and selective. By using this strategy, I was able to break down the data, make sense of them, and put them back together in new ways (p. 57). Concepts were discovered by open and axial coding, and phenomena were developed which in turn lead to the emergence of the "core category: the central phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116).

This chapter includes a description of each level of coding and the concepts, categories, labeled phenomena that resulted from the data analysis. The descriptive story line is introduced, summarizing the major findings and core category. The nature of exemplary teaching will be further developed in the following chapter where the five participating teachers' stories will be highlighted.

Open Coding

"Open coding involves naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62).

Proceeding through the transcripts of interviews, field notes, and the written narratives, each specific incident or idea was named, then sorted, and the end-product was a list of "labelled phenomena" called concepts (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 63).

"During open coding the data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, compared for similarities and differences, and questions are asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 62). Following van Manen's (1984) example, I began by a "highlighting" and then a "line-by-line" approach. The "highlighting" approach revealed experiences, whereas the "line-by-line" approach revealed something about that experience (pp. 21-22). After isolating each incident, event, or key word, I followed Perry's (1994) procedure, by asking the following questions: "What was the teacher doing in this situation?" and "What was the effect of this interaction or action?" (p. 252). I found this difficult, however, and needed to work through the data several times to feel confident that I had done a comprehensive job. In doing so, I followed basic guidelines Strauss (1986) established, and Berg (1995) listed. They included: (a) asking the data a specific and consistent set of questions, (b) analyzing the data minutely, and (c) frequently interrupting the coding to write a theoretical note (Berg, 1995, pp. 186-187). This ensured that I kept the original study aim in mind, and that I remained open to unanticipated results that emerged from the data. It also ensured that I had proceeded in a manner acceptable to conducting an initial coding, beginning with a broad

question, and eventually narrowing it.

Once I had identified and labeled particular phenomena in the data, I began to group the concepts around them. Strauss and Corbin (1990) referred to this process of grouping concepts as "categorizing" and suggested that "categories have conceptual power because they are able to pull together around them other groups of concepts or sub-categories" (p. 65). Four categories resulted.

Category 1: Attributes of Exemplary Teachers.

Sub-category: Qualities of Exemplary Teachers.

1. Caring.
2. Child-oriented.
3. Confident.
4. Consistent.
5. Creative.
6. Diligent.
7. Encouraging.
8. Energetic.
9. Firm.
10. Flexible.
11. Knowledgeable.
12. Patient.
13. Positive.
14. Reflective.
15. Resourceful.
16. Self-motivated.
17. Sincere.
18. Takes initiative.
19. Tolerant.
20. Well organized.
21. Witty.

Sub-category: Expectations of Exemplary Teachers.

Set high expectations for: self (committed to excellence)
students (challenge at individual level)
school (extra curricular involvement)
parents (level of support).

Category 2: Beliefs of Exemplary Teachers.

Sub-category: Beliefs about Education.

In general, education: is very important
effects future
is all encompassing: academics
social skills
life skills
fundamental to life-long learning.

Sub-category: Beliefs about Schools.

Schools are: very important in the life of a student
some students safety net.

Sub-category: Beliefs about Teaching.

Teaching is: very important
touching a life forever
impact the future
satisfying.

Sub-category: Beliefs about Students.

Students: are primary
have rights and responsibilities
should be treated individually
should be challenged
impact the learning environment
can impact the future.

Sub-category: Beliefs about the Teacher-student Relationship.

The teacher-student relationship: is interdependent
is personal
trust is important
mutual respect is important
individual differences accepted
cooperative rather than competitive.

Category 3: Actions/Interactions.

Sub-category: Method of Instruction
Adapting to Meet Individual Needs.

- recognizing students' right to curriculum
- meeting objectives
- individual expectations/task modification
- recognition of different learning styles
- variety of activities - teacher directed, student directed, peer tutoring, small group work, cooperative learning stations, one-on-one assistance, field trips.

Sub-category: Method of Instruction
Modeling.

- meeting objectives
- individual expectations
- sincerity
- respecting all stakeholders.

Sub-category: Method of Instruction
Empowering Students.

- meeting objectives
- individual expectations
- commitment
- sense of ownership
- to assume responsibility for: own actions
  problem solving
  own learning
- to become creative, positive thinkers.

Category 4: Effects of Teaching Actions and Interactions.

Sub-category: Building a Partnership.

- working towards a common goal
- a sense of ownership.
- recognizing the student-teacher relationship: essential ingredients
- recognizing strengths and weaknesses
- developing to full potential
- mutual respect.

Sub-category: Affirmation of Successes

- shared experience
- self discovery
- continued growth of students and teacher.

Axial Coding

Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined axial coding as "a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding" (p. 96). Although some axial coding occurs naturally during open coding, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that, unless you make use of the model, your grounded theory will lack density and precision (p. 99). In this model, sub-categories are linked to a category in a set of relationships in the following way: (a) causal conditions to (b) phenomenon, to (c) context, to (d) intervening conditions, to (e) action/interaction strategies, to (f) consequences (p.99). Each element follows directly from the one preceding it.

Casual conditions refer to the events or incidents that lead to the occurrence or development of a phenomenon. Context then, "represents the specific set of properties that pertain to a phenomenon [or] the particular set of conditions within which the action/interaction strategies are taken to ...

respond to a specific phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 101). Intervening conditions act to either facilitate or constrain the action/interactional strategies taken within a specific context. In the context of the inclusive classroom, intervening conditions may include such things as time, space, classroom culture, individual learning styles. The action/interaction strategies are carried out in response to, or to manage a phenomenon, and the consequences are the outcomes of those actions.

The results of using this model to make connections between categories and sub-categories follow:

1. Adapting to Meet Individual Needs

(a) Casual Conditions: teacher qualities (child oriented, creative, encouraging, energetic, flexible knowledgeable, patient, reflective, resourceful, well organized).

(b) Phenomenon: adapting to meet individual needs.

(c) Context: nature of an inclusive classroom (wide range of students' academic skills and behavioral needs).

(d) Intervening Conditions: time (September to June), curricular demands, and student-teacher relationships.

(e) Actions/Interactions: appropriate use of instructional strategies and realistic expectations.

(f) Consequences: building a partnership, reaching full potential, mutual respect, and affirmation of successes.

2. Modeling.

(a) Casual Conditions: teacher qualities (consistent, confident, creative diligent, encouraging, energetic, firm, patient, positive, sincere, witty).

(b) Phenomenon: Modeling.

(c) Context: nature of an inclusive classroom (wide range of students' academic skills and behavioral needs).

(d) Intervening Conditions: time (September to June), curricular demands, and student-teacher relationship.

(e) Actions/Interactions: appropriate use of instructional strategies, appropriate use of dramaturgy, and timing.

(f) Consequences: building a partnership, reaching full potential, mutual respect, and affirmation of successes.

3. Empowering Students.

(a) Casual Conditions: teacher qualities (child-oriented, confident, consistent, creative, flexible, firm, knowledgeable, patient)

(b) Phenomenon: empowering students.

(c) Context: nature of an inclusive classroom (wide range of students' academic skills and behavioral needs).

(d) Intervening Conditions: time (September to June), curricular demands, and student-teacher relationship.

(e) Actions/Interactions: appropriate use of instructional strategies (with emphasis on student directed learning), open communication.

(f) Consequences: building a partnership, reaching full potential, mutual respect, and affirmation of successes.

Because this study took place in inclusive classrooms, the casual conditions, context, and intervening conditions for the analysis remained relatively constant. Though the actions/interactions are different for the three phenomena described, the consequences of the actions share similarities. This suggested the emergence of a possible core category which will be highlighted in the story line described in the selective coding section of this chapter.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggested that, in such a structured and limited format, it may be difficult to capture the complexity of the phenomena identified. Axial coding does not allow for detailed explanations or descriptions, nor does it allow for flexibility. For example, choosing one science topic over another may be viewed as an intervening condition (curricular expectation) or an action (appropriate instructional strategy). However, as Perry (1994) pointed out "this limitation is a strength of the method because it forces the researcher to make choices and to focus on what are possibly the most important discoveries" (p. 261).

Fortunately, selective coding allows the researcher to go beyond labeling and categorizing concepts. The third level of analysis gives rise to "the conceptualization of a descriptive narrative about the central phenomenon of the study" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 119).

Selective Coding

Selective coding bridges concepts to theory; description to

conceptualization. It is here that the core category is selected and systematically related to other categories in the form of a descriptive story line. It is here that the description of the exemplary teacher begins to unfold. The explication of the story line may add to the understanding of exceptional teaching in general, and to exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students.

As Strauss and Corbin (1990) demonstrated, to write this story, the question: "What about this study is most striking?" must be asked (p. 119). You begin by writing what the story seems to be about. Once committed to a story line, "it is time to tell the story analytically ... this means, just as with open and axial coding, that the central phenomenon has to be given a name, and as a category gradually be related to other categories" (p. 120). The image of the exemplary teacher mainstreaming students with mild to moderate learning problems begins to emerge.

The Descriptive Story Line

The main story in this study is about outstanding teachers and how they successfully mainstream special needs students into regular classrooms. Principals and other teachers are aware of colleagues they consider exceptional, and many are willing to nominate those they consider exemplary.

It appears that these exemplary teachers believe that education is very important. They view education as fundamental to successful living and

believe it to be multi-dimensional, not simply academically oriented. They suggest that school is very important in the life of a student and maintain that for many "at risk" children, school may be the only safe place for them.

These exemplary teachers believe that teaching is very important; perhaps the most important profession there is. They maintain that teaching impacts the future and that teaching is "touching a life forever." They are committed to life-long learning, and avail themselves of professional development activities. They articulate a sense that they, themselves, are always learning and growing, and that they change from year to year. They acknowledge that they influence the students, and the students influence them. They maintain that mutual respect and trust is fundamental to the teacher-student relationship, and that, like a partnership, teacher and student must work together toward common goals.

They are child-oriented and see the student as primary. They demonstrate respect for individuality and believe that all students can learn and reach their full potential. They do maintain, however, that students must assume responsibility for their learning, and that students can impact the learning environment, both positively and negatively.

These exemplary teachers set high expectations. They are committed to excellence, personally and professionally. They are diligent and often assume a great deal of extra curricular responsibility. They do not resent this, however, because they believe that the students need the enrichment and enjoyment extra curricular events offer, and that, they too, benefit from

becoming involved with the students outside the classroom. They challenge students, but are careful to do so at individual levels. They expect, but do not always receive, high levels of support from parents, and will assume a "parent-like" role if necessary.

Recognizing that all special needs students have the right to receive similar educational experiences as "regular" students do, these exemplary teachers will adapt the programming to meet individual needs. They recognize that there are different learning styles and implement a variety of activities to ensure that all students are actively engaged in the learning process. They are constantly modeling such things as appropriate behaviors, problem solving strategies, pro social skills, or enthusiasm for subject, because they recognize that if they do not personify what they want children to see and learn, they will not reach the same level of success with their students. These exemplary teachers are confident and want to empower children to assume responsibility for their own learning and growth. They want children to become positive, creative thinkers and view the teacher-student relationship as cooperative rather than competitive.

These exemplary teachers communicate a sincere desire that all students can learn and that all students can reach their full potential. Special needs students, like all the children in the class, seem to understand that message and strive to succeed. The students begin to communicate, in actions and in words, that they can meet the expectations set by these exemplary teachers. This desire to move forward is not isolated to academic

success, but can be seen in the social/emotional domains as well.

Ultimately, all that these exemplary teachers do, is centered around the notion of student growth and development, specifically a moving forward academically, socially and emotionally. They recognize, that the steps forward each student takes, will be different, and that there will be times when individuals may fall back, nevertheless, the progress must be acknowledged. They view this movement forward, no matter how small, as paramount to the teacher-student relationship, that it is something shared. Student success is teacher success and teacher success is student success. This affirmation of success, that what teacher and student are doing together, seems to be the reason for exemplary teaching.

From Description to Conceptualization

In this study, the core category is affirmation of successes. Affirmation of successes is the one phenomenon that is able to "encompass all that has been described in the story" (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 121). The core category encompasses teachers' values and beliefs, actions and interactions, and consequences of those actions. It is the affirmation of successes that seems to be the motivation to continue to be an exemplary teacher.

Affirmation, as defined in Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language is "the act of affirming or asserting as true; that which is asserted; confirmation; ratification; a solemn declaration made in lieu of an oath ... (1980, p. 16). Success in Webster's Third New International

Dictionary is defined as "something that ensues: outcome, consequence ... the degree or measure of attaining a desired end (1986, p. 837). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), "grounded theory is an action oriented model, therefore in some way the theory has to show action and change" (p. 123). Although success will be measured differently for each student: some by giant leaps forward, while other successes will be measured by tiny steps, the definition of success implies that action that has taken place. Exemplary teachers, in all that they believe and do, work toward this movement forward. Affirmation of successes "is at the heart of the integration process. It is the essential cement in putting together - and keeping together properly - all the components in the theory" about exemplary teaching in an inclusive setting. (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 124).

Determining the Properties and Dimensions of the Core Category

Having identified the core category, it is time to relate the other categories to it. These then become the "subsidiary categories." According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), this is done by means of the model: (a) conditions leads to , (b) context which leads to, (c) strategies then leads to, (d) actions strategies and interactions which leads to, (e) consequences (p. 124). Although similar to the structure used for axial coding, intervening conditions has been left out, though always influencing the outcomes. Using this template, the researcher arranges and rearranges the categories until they seem to fit the analytic version of the story. "The storytelling and its

sequential order are the keys to ordering the categories in a clear fashion. If the story is told accurately and logically, the ordering of categories should proceed without a great deal of difficulty" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 129).

In the story of these exemplary teachers the following seems to fit the story line described: (a) qualities of exemplary teachers (casual conditions) leads to, (b) successful mainstreaming of special needs students into regular classrooms (phenomenon) which leads to, (c) the nature of the inclusive classroom with a wide range of learning and behavioral needs (context) then leads to, (d) adapting programming, modeling appropriate behaviors and reactions, and empowering students (actions and interactions) which in turn leads to (e) the building of a partnership, and affirmation of successes.

As Perry (1994) pointed out, it is not likely that the components of this model follow one another in such a fashion. "For example, context probably has an influence on each of the other elements of this formula. It is doubtful that the context follows from the phenomenon as the model suggest. Likewise, the actions/interactions are part of the cause for the phenomenon as well as a result of it" (p. 267). However, the model did serve its purpose for me. It provided a structured approach whereby I could systematically collect and analyze data towards grounded theory. Additional steps could be taken to validate the relationships among the categories proposed, but that goes beyond the scope of this study. However, the analysis did yield important information which helped define the nature of exemplary teaching while mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms.

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced grounded theory as a strategy to discover qualities of exemplary teaching in inclusive classrooms. Through open, axial, and selective coding, characteristics of exemplary teaching were clarified and beliefs of exemplary teachers were identified. Adapting programming, modeling significant behaviors, and empowering students to assume responsibility for their own learning and behaviors came to the forefront as important actions/interactions of exemplary teaching. The effects of these teaching actions/interactions were linked to the building of a partnership, and affirmation of successes. A descriptive story resulted which highlighted affirmation of successes as the core category with which all other categories were linked.

The discovery of categories, phenomena, the core category, and the story line resulting from the grounded theory approach presented in this chapter began to answer the question: What are the characteristics of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms? However, to obtain the full description of the essence of teaching special needs students in an inclusive setting, a further analysis was done. The exemplary teachers' stories were told and analyzed from a phenomenological perspective and are presented in the following chapter. This further analysis, together with the findings from the grounded theory approach, resulted in a richer more detailed picture of exceptional teaching.

Chapter 5

Research Findings: A Phenomenological Approach

Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter revealed the method I chose to discover phenomena about exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms. Patterning my approach after the work done by Perry (1994), I employed Strauss and Corbin's (1990) three levels of analysis to determine the concepts, categories, story line, and finally the core category about exceptional teaching. Although this grounded theory technique yielded abundant data and discovery, a second approach was needed to foster the "rich description" about exemplary teachers.

Like Perry (1994), I chose a qualitative, phenomenological approach for the second analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) explained the characteristics of qualitative research. First, qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument. Qualitative researchers go to the particular setting under study because they are concerned with content. Second, qualitative research is descriptive. Furthermore, qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products. In addition, qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. Theory developed this way emerges from the bottom up. The researcher does not put together a

puzzle whose picture he or she already knows. Instead the researcher is constructing a picture which slowly emerges as the parts are collected and examined. Finally, "meaning" is of prime importance. The qualitative researcher is most concerned with "participant perspectives" (pp. 27-29).

The purpose for using this method of analysis was to describe, as much as possible, "lived experiences," which, according to van Manen (1990), "are the starting points and end points of phenomenological research" (p. 36).

> The aim of phenomenology is to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence - in such a way that the effect of the text is at once a reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience. (van Manen,1990, p. 36)

Perry (1994) pointed out that phenomenology is the study and description of human experiences, whereas hermeneutics is the interpretation of the experiences (p. 17). Researchers suggest that the terms phenomenology and hermeneutics are often used interchangeably and that it is acceptable to do so (Gaut, 1981; Oiler, 1986). For example, Eichelberger (1989) suggested that "hermeneutic studies are often similar to those of social phenomenologists" (p. 9).

> They want to know what meaning people attribute to activities ... and how that relates to their behavior. These researchers are [clear] ... that they are constructing the "reality" on the basis of their interpretations of data with the help of the participants who provided the data in the study. (p.9)

For the purpose of this study, phenomenology and hermeneutics will be used interchangeably. I am in agreement with Gaut (1981), who defined hermeneutic phenomenology as "the interpretation of concealed meaning within a phenomenon", and suggested that "it becomes difficult and perhaps unnecessary to differentiate between hermeneutics (the interpretation) and phenomenology (the description) since at one level of understanding a description is itself an interpretation" (Perry, 1994, p. 17).

To avoid misinterpretation, and since the goal of this study was to discover and describe qualities of exemplary teaching, the findings are presented, as much as possible, in the participants own words. This is in keeping with a qualitative, phenomenological study, and will help the researcher analyze the data "with all of it's richness" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, p. 28).

> They are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes occurring in local contexts. With qualitative data one can

> preserve chronological flow, assess local causality, and derive fruitful explanations. Then too, qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings and to new theoretical integrations; they help researcher go beyond initial preconceptions and frameworks. Finally, the findings from qualitative studies have a quality of "undeniability" ... Words, especially when they are organized into incidents or stories, have concrete, vivid, meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader ... than pages of numbers. (Miles & Huberman, 1986, p. 15)

Unlike the structure and process in Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory method, phenomenology has no set procedure. Perry (1994) pointed out, however, that there may be no specific method or program, there is a tradition. Perry wrote that "in doing phenomenology the researcher searchs for 'the critical moments of inquiry.' These moments are ultimately elusive to systematic explication" (p. 20). To illustrate her claim, Perry cited van Manen (1990) who wrote "such moments depend more on the interpretive sensitivity, inventiveness, thoughtfulness, scholarly tact, and writing talent of the human science researcher" (van Manen, 1990, p. 34). To add to the complexity, van Manen (1990) suggested that "to do hermeneutic phenomenology is to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the life world, and yet to remain

aware that lived life is always more complex that an explication of meaning can reveal" (p. 18).

Difficult as this may be, Perry (1994) pointed out that an attempt at the impossible still has merit (p. 19). Though a description can never capture all, it does bring us closer to an understanding of a phenomenon: exemplary teaching.

This chapter will present the "rich description" about exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms. Beginning with "teachers' beliefs about education" and following the categories discovered during open and axial coding, the teachers' life experiences will be told in their own words, directly from the field notes, or in the form of detailed descriptions or stories. To further emphasize a point, poetry, quotations, and statements from educational literature will be used.

What Exemplary Teachers Believe

In teaching

it is the method and not the content

that is the message …

the drawing out, not the pumping in.

(Peter, 1977, p. 465)

About Education. It would seem that one characteristic of exemplary teachers is that they are deeply rooted in a philosophy of education that recognizes that education is very important. During the interviews, when asked: "Is education important to everyone?" the answers were immediate and personal. For example, during the semi-structured interview, when Mr. Bell spoke about the importance of education, he leaned forward and began to speak passionately.

> ... it determines what we are going to do for the rest of our lives ... Whatever comes after education ... it affects everything. Everything! Your entire life! So, of course it's important ... you've got to look at education holistically and you realize that it's not just training people for jobs or careers, it is training them for life as well ... so of course it's important!

Miss Ross concurred with Mr. Bell, but added the following:

> I think everyone has the right to education, in whatever form it may be ... it is an essential part of life. Education is also a life-long thing. It never stops, so I think it is something that is constantly changing and constantly building, and should happen everyday of your life ... formal or informal.

Miss Evans suggested that education will impact or has impacted everyone, therefore the importance of education cannot be denied.

> Yes education is important and ... the reason is ... everyone goes through it or is affected by it. I talk to my friends all the time about it, and they are not teachers ... but they are all wondering about it. They ask, "How are you addressing some of the issues in education?" or "If I had a child in your room what would you be doing to meet his needs?" So I think that education is important in society.

Although Mrs. Hardy agreed that education is very important, she did not agree that everyone views education in that way. "I wish that it was, but when I take a look at the attitudes kids bring to school and the level of support some get at home or don't get at home, I would have to say that education is not important to everyone." She went on to explain that everyone needs an education. "An education is just not schooling, its everything. Its academics, social skills, and life skills. It is the whole 'kit'n kaboodle'. You can't be successful without an education, and so it is very unfortunate that not everyone views education as essential."

Mrs. Drake, who agreed with the other participants was adamant that education is essential. She answered this way:

I believe education is empowering and I take my job very seriously, in that I am here to empower every child ... not only in my class, but all the children in the school if I can possibly touch them and inspire them. I believe in life-long learning, so that education is not something that just happens in the classroom. I think it's basis and it's inspiration and some of the format and thinking structures can be established during formal education, and continue on into post-secondary education or into adult life.

About School. Miss Evans also suggested that for many inner-city children, and for some students in other areas, school is their life-line. For many of her "regular" students, as well as for her seven learning disabled youngsters, school is their "security blanket." "I think school is important to all kids in all schools, but especially for kids in the inner-city ... it is a safe place for them and education is their only safety net. They know why they are here, and it is a big part of their life. Sometimes it is their only bright spot."

This was illustrated on my first visit to Mrs. Drake's classroom. We had agreed that I come to school early the first morning so that I could orient myself with the classroom. Although I had visited with Mrs. Drake the week before, I felt that we still needed time to clear up issues such as learning where the special needs students sit in the classroom, what the morning agenda would be, and so on, and I was sure Mrs. Drake would have

questions.

Mrs. Drake's classroom was out in an old portable classroom. I arrived before eight o'clock and went into the school. I found her in the copier room preparing materials for the morning. We chatted for a moment while she finished up before making our way out to the portable. When we entered I was surprised to see a student sitting at her desk reading. Mrs. Drake introduced me to Carly before showing me around the classroom and arranging a spot for me at the back of the room. We cleared up questions we had and then decided to go to the staffroom for a coffee so that Mrs. Drake could introduce me to the staff. I could not help but notice how relaxed and happy Carly seemed. Watching her sitting in her desk, reading her book as Mrs. Drake and I went about our business, I was reminded of a youngster sitting in her livingroom at home. It was obvious that Carly was at ease.

While walking to the staffroom, Mrs. Drake told me that Carly's mother dropped Carly off early each morning on her way to work. At first Mrs. Drake was not aware of this until one day in late September when Mrs. Drake found Carly sitting in a dark hallway by the front door. Mrs. Drake spoke to Carly's mother, but apparently no other arrangements could be made, so Mrs. Drake began coming to school earlier to be sure to be there before Carly.

"I was appalled to find out that Carly was sitting in the dark. I let her know right away that she is welcome to come into the classroom anytime that I am here. All my students are welcome to come in. I want them to feel

comfortable and at home in the classroom. It is theirs as much as it is mine."

On occasion, when Mrs. Drake is late, Carly waits in the dark hallway, watching out the window of the front door. When she sees Mrs. Drake's car round the corner, Carly runs out and greets her. They then make their way out to "their" portable. Carly feels safe at school, and thanks to her teacher, she feels welcomed there as well.

Standing there

Dirty face, messy hair, tattered clothes.

Frightened

She looks over her shoulder.

When the bell rings

A sigh of relief is heard.

She skips into the school

So happy to be there.

About Teaching. In addition to the notion that education and schools are essential, is the belief that the teaching profession is important. This notion was emphasized when I entered the pilot participant's grade six classroom. I noticed a small poster that was placed directly behind Mr. Bell's desk. It read:

The greatest contribution to mankind

is to be sure

there is a teacher in every classroom

who cares that every student, every day,

learns and grows, and feels

like a real human being.

All participants view teaching as important. Miss Ross believes that teaching "is the most important job that you could possibly have … because without instilling a love of learning in small children, and without giving them a desire to continue learning, they won't grow to their full potential." Miss Evans concurred and added that teaching is important because "you are reaching thirty different human beings every single day and you are affecting how they are going to be tomorrow, later on, next year." She noted that she may not affect every child in the manner that she hoped to, but hopefully she adds something positive to their lives to help them reach their potential.

Mr. Bell suggested that what is important about the profession is the human element.

> Well yes the profession is important. I think back to the cut backs to education … and people were brain storming all these "fantastical" ideas on how to save money. And one ridiculous idea that came out

> was … perhaps we could put a teacher aide in a classroom of kids, and by the way, one who is much cheaper than a teacher, and then hook up all the rooms to a camera and put TV monitors in all the rooms. Now the one teacher would stand in front of the camera and give a lecture and all the children would be watching this one teacher on TV. One teacher teaching, and it being played in all the classrooms. Put tapes in VCR's and teach that way. Ridiculous! The fact of the matter is, it is the human element that makes teaching so very important.

Mrs. Hardy also believes that teaching is paramount. She suggested that teachers can impact the future by helping students. "If I can touch one child … if I can help one child learn to treat people fairly … or teach them other important life skills, then I have done something positive. I want to make the world a better place to be. It is my job, my responsibility to do that to the best of my ability." Mrs. Drake agreed but added:

> I do believe that teaching is touching a life forever. It is also touching the future, so that the children passing through my classroom right now, hopefully will become stronger, better people, who are resourceful and who are good thinkers. By that I mean creative, positive thinkers, who will continue to feel that they can basically do

whatever they choose to do. To do it by breaking it into chunks, and by being able to call on help or resource people whenever they need to. So I feel what I am doing isn't just a ten month job, but it is affecting the children's lives forever.

This was illustrated in a written narrative Mrs. Drake shared with me.

I Want to Be ...

Throughout my teaching career I have maintained strong beliefs about the necessity of positive attitude and good self-esteem. I believed that if I could help a student to feel good about and believe in himself or herself goals could be reached.

In my eleventh year of teaching I began with my fifth and sixth graders. Many of my students were English as a Second Language, two had mild learning problems, and one had more severe learning disorders. I started in September, building rapport, winning them over, and boosting self-esteem. By mid October they were happily facing and meeting challenges daily.

In January a new student joined our wonderful group. He seemed to have two moods - sullen and angry. He seemed to have two ways of interacting with others - with stony silence or with explosive, abusive words. He had come from Vietnam three years

before. He was funded as a special needs student and during all activities Vu refused to participate, but I had the impression he was listening and comprehending. One day when classmates were discussing what they were aspiring to be and why, he was rolling his eyeballs and muttering. I continued to include him when explaining expectations.

After some time he began coming into the classroom early and staying late. Vu would tidy and organize and ask questions of me. He wanted to know everything about my home life. I was able to find out about him. Vu was alone in this country. He had witnessed horrors as he left his country. He was separated from both his parents and his sister. He did not know if they had survived. He went on to tell me about his own frightening experiences when he arrived in Edmonton. I could appreciate his anger.

Vu began participating in class activities, often looking to me for a signal if he had any doubts. He knew I believed in him, and slowly he began to believe in himself. In May Vu volunteered to be the Master of Ceremonies of our talent show. His tremendous sense of organization and his sensitivity toward participants facilitated an excellent show. During the program he announced to me that he had a surprise ending (while the judges were completing their comments). Vu did a lip sync to "I Just Called to Say I Love You". If I had any

doubts about the importance of believing, they were pushed out of my head by the words of that song. I wondered if this believing would be long lasting.

Within the next week, Vu received word that his mother had been located. He was leaving to live with her in the United States. Vu was packed and gone from the classroom before I could say all that I had wanted to say. Would he continue to believe in himself? Had his self-esteem grown enough? I filled with worry.

Minutes had gone by when I heard a knock. In the doorway was Vu, breathless. "I know what I want to be … the President of the U.S.A."

With that he was gone, and so were my worries for him.

Clearly, education, schools and the teaching profession are important. Ornstein (1990) pointed out that despite well-publicized research that promotes the notion that IQ, family life, peer groups and social class are the most important variables for successful education, "research over the last 15 years does indicate that teachers and schools *do* make a difference" (p. 5)

About Students. Exemplary teachers are child-oriented and believe that students are primary. They recognize that "teaching is reaching students" and that implies commitment to individual students.

Mr. Bell is committed to teaching to the needs of individual students in his room and regularly asks himself the question: What is best for the child? "The question itself implies individuality." His grade six class is made up of 27 students, four of whom are gifted students, one who is legally blind, and one who is funded as a moderate learning disabled student. Meeting their individual needs is challenging.

> As I am trying to figure out what I am going to do for this [special needs] boy and feeling sorry thinking why should I do this just for him … I realize that the fact is I am not treating him any differently than I am for someone else in the classroom who is not as disabled as he is. I don't treat him any differently than anyone else … Whatever they need I will get. The gifted students need special attention, and the learning disabled student needs special things, so does my legally blind boy … so do all the students in my room …and so its a matter of finding out what they need and trying your very best to do it. There is no magic answer. There is no template … you just do it!

In addition, exemplary teachers respect the individuality of their students. Mrs. Drake, for example, explained that a classroom can become a "richer" environment because of individual differences. Her grade five classroom has three moderate learning disabled students, and three gifted

students. There are students from a wide-range of socio-economic levels, and many of the parents stress fine arts as important programming for their children.

> Treating students as individuals … as difficult as that sometimes is in a classroom … I believe it is very important. When I look around at the 26 individuals I have in here, I am amazed at how different they are, how much they have all developed and grown, how individual they still remain. And I think those differences need to be celebrated. They are starting to appreciate differences in each other, and borrow ideas and thinking strategies from one another and still maintain their own individuality. And that is so important!

Inclusive classrooms facilitate integration of special needs students which has the potential to enrich and enlighten all individuals involved. Biklen, Corrigan, and Quick (1989) stated that studies have indicated that students [and adults] who are not disabled have also benefited from integration programs (p. 213). These benefits can include: (a) a better self-concept, (b) growth in social understanding, (c) increased tolerance of other people, (d) reduced fear of human differences, (e) development of personal principles, and (f) interpersonal acceptance and friendship (Peck, Donaldson, & Pezzopi, 1990, p. 245).

All participants in this study indicated that they are better teachers as a result of having had special needs students in their classrooms. They also agreed that the children, both the regular and special needs, have learned valuable lessons, and the school, in general, has benefitted because of exceptional children. A principal of one of the schools I visited suggested that "putting special needs students 'front and center' is important." He maintained that the principal has to make sure that inclusive education is happening and to support the classroom teacher in whatever way he or she can because "a school with integrated special needs students, is a better school."

Evidence of the positive personal and professional impact of inclusion on teachers can be found in educational literature. For example, one teacher stated that inclusion of special needs students in her classroom has changed the way she teaches. "I think it was really for the better. I think it has made me more flexible. It helped me to understand that all people learn differently and have different things they can do" (Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, and Schattman, 1993, p. 370). As Mr. Bell stated, "I am a better teacher because of my special needs students."

Demonstrating that children are primary is important to the exemplary teachers in this study. An example of a teacher making sure a child feels like "someone special" follows. It was taken directly from my field notes.

As Miss Evans walks about observing and evaluating students' work, she notices Jerry who is sitting under a table. His face is buried in his hands and he is crying. Quietly Miss Evans makes her way over to him. She squats down and begins to speak quietly to him. I cannot hear what they are saying, but I can see that Miss Evans is concerned. As they continue to dialogue, Miss Evans crawls under the table and sits beside him. She puts her arm around him and he leans his head on her shoulder. They continue to whisper quietly to each other. Jerry stops crying. Other students begin looking for Miss Evans, but she ignores their calls while she talks with Jerry. As the students, who are looking for Miss Evans, realize that she is sitting with Jerry, they stop requesting her assistance and go back to whatever it was they were doing. It is as if they realize that this is Jerry's moment with Miss Evans. They do not seem to resent this. For the moment, Jerry is the most important person to Miss Evans. It is as if they know that soon, they will be Miss Evans' most important person.

A second example of a teacher letting a student know that he is valued follows. This excerpt was taken from my field notes.

The students are working quietly. Mrs. Drake is walking about the room taking pictures of the students for their portfolios. (She does this

all the time and the children do not seem to notice as she walks by and snaps their picture). As she does so, she is also monitoring and evaluating their work. As she takes George's picture she notices that he is not completing the assignment properly. He appears to be frustrated. Mrs. Drake puts the camera down, puts her hands behind her back, leans over and smiles at George. Quietly she begins to re-direct George. She makes constant eye contact and speaks positively to him. She does this in a manner that does not draw attention to him. While she is talking to him and answering his questions, it seems that she is oblivious to everyone else in the room. Clearly, George is her number one priority at the moment. He knows it and so do I!

Miss Ross suggested that meeting the needs of individual students is a very important part of her job. "Each child is an individual. They have their own strengths, their own needs, and their own learning styles and it is my responsibility to accommodate those different methods of learning, needs, and all of that … I think it is important to look at the strengths of each student and to work with those strengths."

Miss Ross, who teaches in a grade one/two classroom, instructs a wide range of academic strengths and needs. Two students are severely disabled, classified as "trainable mentally handicapped," one student is funded as a mild to moderate learning disabled, while one student is funded

as gifted. There are also two English as a Second Language students in the class. She maintained that the success she is experiencing in her inclusive classroom is due largely to the programming that she offers.

> Each have very specific needs, but each has a definite potential, so … the program has to be developed in such a way that they reach their full potential. Their potentials may be very different, how they are met may be completely different … like setting different goals with the children and their parents. It is different expectations, in large assignments to everyday types of things … and making sure that that is happening everyday and that goals are in line with the students … so that they have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Ornstein (1990) pointed out that "the research in general indicates that students who are taught by teachers who adapt instruction to their needs, especially low achieving or mildly handicapped students, learn more than students in traditional classes or in large-group instruction" (p. 436). He went on to explain that all students "are capable of learning more when instructional methods mesh with their abilities" (p. 436).

Exemplary teachers do not believe that the responsibility for learning or for student successes rests solely on teachers' shoulders. Rosenshine (1983) suggested that effective teachers make students accountable for their

own learning (p. 349). Miss Evans explained that students have the right to come to school and that it will be a successful and safe place for them, but she added that students must realize that school "is a place of expectations" as well. "Their responsibilities … are to do what is expected … to follow school and classroom routines and rules. Students must do their work to the best of their ability and to take responsibility to be social beings … to get along with others."

Mrs. Hardy concurred with Miss Evans but added that she believes "students can help create environments that foster learning." She explained that if students have the right to be treated with respect and dignity, and have the right to learn, then they have the responsibility to treat others with respect and dignity, and to help provide an atmosphere that is conducive to learning." High above the chalkboard is a poster which emphasizes Mrs. Hardy's belief that students share the responsibility for creating a classroom atmosphere conducive to learning.

Classroom Creed

I have the right to be treated with respect and dignity. It is my responsibility to treat others in a way I would like to be treated. It is my responsibility to try my best and use my time wisely in all subject areas. It is my responsibility to help others, cooperate, and set good examples for others. We're all in this together. It is up to us!

Mr. Bell agreed that students share in the responsibility and called this the "interpersonal responsibility." He explained, "If students are going to expect certain rights they have the responsibility to follow these same rights for other people in the classroom." Mr. Bell shared a narrative with me about a boy who was out of control. Alfred had been placed in Mr. Bell's classroom midway through September because he was not coping in a segregated classroom and it was hoped that a change to an inclusive classroom and a male teacher would help him.

The Day That Alfred Flipped His Paradigm

> Alfred was out of touch, out of sync, and literally, out of control. His tickets were Learning Disabled, Attention Deficit Disorder, and Behavior Disorder. Within segregation he became caught up in a vicious cycle; a rhythm that involved his labels … he spiraled out of control as he lost his tenuous footing on a very slippery tight-rope. He was consistently drawn in to inappropriate behaviors with his classmates … he was distracted to the point where he became so focused on socio-behavioral dynamics that learning became of tertiary importance, behind "standing his ground," or "defending his turf." It would seem to this observer that his goal was to make it through the day with his self esteem intact. Unfortunately, that meant he would

have to fight for it. And he did. Being "tough" was practically the only device that he ever employed. As he and I were to learn some time later, however, he did have many more tools at his disposal, he just needed to dig down somehow, unearth them, and utilize them.

The switch from his special needs classroom to my "regular" classroom came early in the fall. At first, Alfred was rather lost in his new surroundings. He had arrived in a grade three/four classroom of 25 students, one of whom had learning problems, four who were gifted, and 19 who were in the regular program. There was no one there to tease him. He had no ground to defend. The threat to his self-esteem within this setting was nonexistent. Along with the change in venue came a change in Alfred, and although his different persona were juxtaposed, and could easily be interchanged, his behavior within the classroom was the diametrical opposite of what he had displayed only days before.

That is, until the day his former classmates visited for a science lesson. Even though I had talked to him previously about the visit, he simply was not prepared. He was caught off-guard, and was subsequently drawn into the same unsuitable inter-dynamics that had rendered him a "non-learner" in his previous setting. Inevitably he retreated as he hid motionless under my desk while our visitors left.

Weeks later, Alfred's former classmates were to visit again. I

wanted to envelope Alfred within a shell to harbor him from what I imagined would be a repeat performance of the previous debacle. But that would not do. A day before our visitors arrived I made a point of sitting down with Alfred, to warn him of this next visit and to search for possible solutions. As I spoke to him of the potential visit, he listened intently. Then I threw the question out to him: Alfred, what can you do differently this time if you are teased or taunted by your old classmates? At this point I was more than prepared to cancel the entire experience should Alfred feel unduly threatened. What a great and wonderful surprise it was when he looked me straight in the eyes and spoke quietly, but positively: "Mr. Bell, I will just ignore them and walk away." Totally caught by surprise, I smiled at him, offered him the "high five", and looked forward to the visit. But I realized that following through would be an impressive hurdle. For Alfred the task was a formidable one. Transformation became his Everest.

At first, the tension that was felt previously was there again, the attempts to draw Alfred into a verbal battle were as strong this time. Somehow though, Alfred found a way to follow through on his plans. When he was teased and taunted, he did ignore them, and walk away. He did walk his talk. Obviously, I had underestimated this young boy, as most people had. Alfred was able to assume responsibility for his actions.

> Alfred was an amazing individual. He more than met his challenge, he had climbed his Everest, and not just because it was there, but because he wanted to change and because he willed himself to do so.

All participants agreed that students must assume responsibility, not only for their actions, but for their learning as well. Mr. Bell stated that students "have the responsibility to challenge themselves and to do their very best … to set realistic goals and try to achieve them." Miss Ross suggested that students are not like little sponges. "They have to put effort into what they do to get the most out of it. They need to realize, that as they grow up, they won't always have someone telling them what to do, so they have to learn to … take responsibility for themselves to continue their learning." Mrs. Drake added the following:

> I do believe students have a responsibility to complete tasks, to treat others with respect, to treat me with respect. I believe they have a responsibility to develop a commitment and a sense of dedication and a feeling of enjoyment about learning and I am here to provide some of the guidance and materials they need to do that.

About the Student-Teacher Relationship. Exemplary teachers believe the student-teacher relationship is important. They recognize that students have a great influence on them as educators. One participant responded:

> Do my students influence me? Oh yes! They have a great influence over me. I don't always notice it or am conscious of it, but of course they do. I mean, I am only one person out of twenty-seven. But you know, I let them influence me ... I do try to give them a say in what goes on ... but besides all the obvious stuff like helping to determine the seating plan, they, as individuals have influenced me. My blind student has influenced me, and my special needs student has influenced me. They have all had an influence on me and on how I teach and what I teach. The have all influenced how I behave in the classroom.

Mrs. Drake emphasized the influence her students have had on her by saying:

> I think that I become a different person every year that I teach. I enjoy hearing from former students and I do get a lot of feedback through phone calls or chance meetings. I think that helps me to see what's working with what I do as a teacher so I can hold on to some

strategies and philosophies and throw others out. I can also, I believe, keep some youth in spite of my gray hairs. I think teaching keeps me young and keeps me fresh in my thinking. I think, as an educator, its impossible to become a stereotype because you are dealing with these fresh faces every year, and going through moments of discovery over and over and over again. I think more than being a parent, when they watch their child grow there are first times for everything, as a teacher, after 26 years, I am still seeing so many firsts … and the excitement they feel is my excitement too.

Working with 25 grade six students, two who are functioning with mild to moderate learning problems, Mrs. Hardy has come to realize that her students can teach her a great deal. When asked if her students influence her she answered, "They have enlightened me."

I have learned so much from my students. So much! Well, like treating kids with respect and dignity. They are no longer children. Many are young adults; they are growing up. I think they have taught me to be more sensitive. I always thought that one of my strengths was my empathy. Well, I have learned a lot more this year … they are older so they are able to articulate their problems … about the baggage they carry with them … they are willing to share with me.

Like Mrs. Hardy, Mrs. Drake has been taught many valuable lessons by her students. This was illustrated in a second narrative she shared with me.

My Little Mosquito

During my first year of teaching I had an experience that was to shape my teaching career. I spent the summer preparing my classroom for my second grade students. My classroom reflected well what I had learned at university. The walls and bulletin boards were filled with teacher made products ... only the students were missing. When they arrived, I was able to quickly get them "sorted" based on methods and tests I had gained from my university training. The result was, of course, three reading groups. To my surprise, however, I had one "special" student who did not fit in any reading group. This was his third year in school and he was thought to be a non-reader.

I soon began to see this student as a pest. He wore glasses with extremely thick lenses and he constantly buzzed around my desk asking "Teacher, can I read your book?" I had a copy of "The Hobbit" on my desk because I was taking a children's literature course. "My Little Mosquito", as I called him in my Journal, was extremely irritating. Why hadn't I taken a course that told me what to do with such a student?

Finally, one afternoon I responded to his question. In exasperation I said "Okay, Greg, if you can read the first page in my book you can read the book." I pushed the book at him and tried to calm down and think about what I would have him do when he realized his folly …

I can still feel the shock, embarrassment, and anger with myself when Greg read the first page out loud to me. The impact of this incident caused me to question myself as a teacher. I realized how much I had to learn about being a teacher - everything.

My true teacher education began then with me truly looking at and getting to know my students. I began reading about education that was child-centered. I read all that I could find … seeds began to be planted. I was certain of the teacher I did not want to be and I was discovering the teacher I wanted to become. As the year went by, Greg became a more settled, successful student and I became a more restless, searching teacher.

This philosophy has continued over the years. I am committed to investigating and learning new ideas and methods as I continue to develop my own philosophy of teaching. I look back fondly to the bite that I experienced from "My Little Mosquito."

Influence resulting from the relationship between the children and adult in the classroom is not one-way. Clearly, students have a great impact on their teachers and exemplary teachers appreciate and expect that, but the participants in this study all agree that they influence their students as well.

Gloeckler and Simpson (1988) stated that "the teacher-student relationship is one of the most critical factors in [education] ... mutual feelings of trust, respect, and affection will often develop in the classroom and will be strong motivators in both learning and social behavior" (p. 143). Exemplary teachers realize the power of this relationship and nurture it. "For many students praise from a respected adult is far stronger than tangible rewards" (p. 143).

Exemplary teachers in this study, believe they positively influence their students academically, emotionally and socially as well. Mr. Bell stated:

> I think I do have influence on my students outside the classroom. I am not bragging when I say that ... you learn this as you go along ... But yes, I have impacted my students. For example, one of my students was very disrespectful at the beginning of the year. Very disrespectful to certain students, my visually impaired student for one. I mean I could analyze the situation and say he has low self-esteem so he was putting others down to build himself up, but beyond that he just couldn't do it. I had to bring him aside several times at the beginning

> of the year and have little "heart to heart" talks with him. I had to explain why he shouldn't do that … and model the proper behavior for him. And he has really come around. It is not just me who sees it. Other teachers have told me that they see it too. That's just one example. I know there are other examples where behavior has changed because I've done some things. I think it is true that teachers influence their students.

Mrs. Hardy, emphasized her influence on students' social behavior by saying, "It is nice to see … the light go on when students 'get it,' and that happens a lot and should be celebrated, but it is so sweet to see the student who has limited social skills at the beginning of the year, actually do something nice for another student. That should be celebrated too."

Sometimes the influence teachers have on students is very obvious. The non-reading student who learns to read because a teacher takes the time to individualize the program to meet his needs. The aggressive, angry student who learns pro-social strategies from a gentle, caring educator. The gifted student who was challenged by a teacher to go beyond the expected and to "be all that she can be." Sometimes, however, the influence a teacher has on a student can be so subtle, but no less rewarding. Miss Evans shared such an experience in a narrative she wrote.

Reaching a Child

Michael did not talk very much. He appeared to be very private and secretive. During any reading activity, he claimed "I can't read." During any group activity, he refused to participate. He was what we, as teachers, would call a loner or reclusive. It was a struggle to teach or to reach Michael.

Michael was known as a mild to moderate learning disabled student. With a build up of frustrating things at home and school, Michael also had a behavior disorder. His odd noises and strange reactions to others were puzzling. There were times when Michael would screech out loud, fall asleep in class, and then stay up all night. Michael seemed to hate school through everything he said and did.

The one gift that Michael finally chose to give me appeared during recess break when I had supervision. He began to walk with me the whole time and I knew through this that somehow I had reached Michael. Sometimes we would just walk quietly and sometimes we would talk. It was hard to believe that this was the same child, who just moments ago, had been restrained by the principal for destroying his work.

Michael has since gone for a number of assessments at a specialized center and he continues to face difficulties and hardships at home which are hard for him to deal with. But, during recess, I had

the privilege of believing that I had reached this "so hard to reach" child.

There are so many Michaels today in our classrooms. I certainly hope that I can reach some of them as the years go on, even if it is in the "littlest" way.

Do teachers, even exemplary ones, positively impact all their students all the time? Mrs. Drake realized that she cannot influence everyone.

Something I've learned, I was told probably in about my fourth year of teaching, that I couldn't expect to reach every child. And I was very upset and angry and hurt by that. But I think over the years, I really have accepted that that could possibly be true, because there have been a few individuals … What I've come to realize is that they have to let me in, and if they choose to do that, then I definitely do impact them and that comes through what they say and what they do … hugs, letters I get, and messages from their parents. But if they choose not to let me in, as big as my bag of tricks is, I can't get in. And I do feel badly.

However, Mrs. Drake does admit that she has had an influence on most of the students she has taught. "In thinking back, two come to mind.

Two that I have not reached in the 26 years isn't bad, but I do think about them and wonder."

This positive influence goes beyond students. Often parents are impacted by exemplary teaching. This became obvious during an informal conversation I had with one of Mrs. Drake's students who had come to the back of the classroom where I was sitting. She was finished her assignment and was curious about me. We chatted about where I had taught, if I had any children of my own, and did I like her classroom. She talked about herself before I asked her to tell me about Mrs. Drake. Her response was noted in the following excerpt from the field notes.

> A science lesson is underway. It's noisy but the students are all engaged in active participation or dialogue. They are working in partners, or alone (their choice) designing simple circuit cars. Kate is done. She comes back to visit with me. When asked about Mrs. Drake, she seems keen to respond. As Kate begins to tell me about her teacher, she looks over to where Mrs. Drake is kneeling on the floor helping a classmate, and smiles warmly at her. "She is the best teacher I ever had. She got me doing a lot of things I didn't like. Like reading. I didn't like to read, but now I read at the 12 years 6 months level and I'm reading because of her. What I like best, is she deals fairly with things. Like report cards. She writes exactly what she

means. Like she tells us when we're doing something well. She tells us when we don't do it well and then she helps us. You know, my parents like her and she has done lots for me. Before, my parents thought she was a 'dream come true'. But now they know she is true!" Kate smiles and looks back at Mrs. Drake. "Yup, she is the best teacher I've ever had!"

Mrs. Hardy, also admitted that she has impacted parents as well. In terms of her special needs students, low achieving or gifted, she believes that their parents are her biggest advocates. She maintained that it is because she teaches her students in a way that fosters independence and self-confidence. "There is a lot more risk taking now then there was at the beginning of the year … and students are putting in more effort which parents are really proud of."

Although exemplary teachers may not influence everyone, clearly they impact most students, many parents and families, and as Miss Evans explains, their teaching impacts their own life as well.

When I have a good day with these kids, I am on a "7 am to 11 pm" roll! I am invigorated! I think "WOW," I have impacted these kids and it is a genuine high. There are days when I know I don't reach the kids, and I feel bad. But, I can let it go, and try again … never give up! I

think that if the kids think I am doing a good job, and I know I am doing the best I can, then I feel really good, and it impacts the way I am for the rest of the day!

Actions and Interactions

He tears up the paper angrily.

"I can't do this," he shouts!

"I won't!"

With fists clenched, shoulders hunched

He challenges.

"It's OK, now," she whispers.

"I am here to help."

Gently she places her hand on his shoulder

And smiles.

"We can do this together."

Method of Instruction. In talking with a principal from one of the schools I visited when collecting data for this study, I was impressed with what she had to say.

I have seen the lowest-achieving student experience success because

she had a teacher who believed in her and cared deeply that she reach her full potential. But, I have also seen promising students fail miserably because of teachers who cared more for curriculum than for students.

I was reminded of a quote a friend had shared with me the day before. She had cut out a quote by Ginott which had appeared in an article in the Edmonton Journal which she had read weeks earlier. She could not remember the article she had taken it from or the day on which she had cut it out, but she commented that, as a mother of two young boys, it had made a lasting impression on her. She had it taped to the refrigerator where she could read it daily. The quote read:

> I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is MY response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized.

When reviewing the literature on effective teaching for Chapter Two, it became clear that effective teachers foster student successes. The exemplary teachers in this study are no exception. It is a combination of the qualities of these exceptionally competent teachers and their beliefs about education, school setting, teaching, students as people and the student-teacher relationship which helps define the nature of exemplary teaching.

Adapting to Meet Individual Needs. Bauer and Shea (1989) defined adapting program as "instructional modifications" that address individual student's needs (p. 76). They suggested that instructional modifications are "a series of educational strategies which increase the probability of successful learning particularly through adjustments in content presentation and task responsibility" (p. 368). Glockler and Simpson (1988) stated that although adapting the curriculum is another procedure for addressing individual differences in the regular classroom, modifications in the amount of material given the sequence of presentation, or the omission of content need not interfere with curriculum objectives (p. 74).

Ornstein (1990) described program adaptations for special needs students as "alternating the instructional environment to correspond to the individual's ability and learning skills" (p. 436).

Miss Ross, like all participants in the study, spends considerable time carefully planning to ensure that students have opportunity to engage in

learning that suits their learning styles and challenges them at the level they are at. Farrar, Neufeld, and Miles (1984) maintained that good teachers not only demand achievement at individual levels, but provide opportunities for it to happen (p. 704).

> My goal is that each student experience success in whatever strength they might have. So, I accommodate my lesson plans so that I have something for each student … a lesson plan for each student, if you will, that will give them a great deal of success and pride in what it is they do. And that goes with my expectations. I will have different expectations for certain students and although the outcomes may not look the same, I will be just as pleased with "A" as I will be with "B" if those students are doing their best.

Exemplary teachers demonstrate knowledge of curriculum and of children's cognitive development and are able to match programming to individual students to ensure quality instruction. Mr. Bell, for example, stated that he makes conscious choices when teaching to maximize learning. He referred to a format system of instruction for the four quadrants of different types of learners. He looks at activities so that all four learning types are immersed in something to suit their learning style. Mrs. Hardy also uses a variety of activities to foster learning. "I might use cooperative learning when

I am introducing material that is new. The small group setting helps them to take risks. I try to assess the students' comfort levels and I'll make a decision about whether the activity is successful or not." Mrs. Hardy maintained that she is always trying to decide what mode of learning each student needs and will try to accommodate their needs.

> As might be expected, teachers in exemplary programs have exemplary expectations. They do not wait for something to happen: they know they have the power and the necessity to bring it about. These expectations, for both themselves and their students, are the single most important reason these programs [continue]. These are not teachers with an interest in the status quo … [they are] constantly looking for the most effective strategies, materials and ideas. (Penick, Yager, & Bonnstitter, 1986, p. 17)

"Teachers can individualize in quite traditional classrooms by taking student interests into account and providing choices (Burden & Byrd, 1994, p. 255). Mrs. Drake suggested that to individualize programming, you must adapt curriculum and match it to children.

> I do spend the summer getting ready for September if I know what level I will be teaching. I begin collecting materials and think about

how I am going to integrate art and various subjects together. I spend half my summer in book stores and reading. But the missing component would be the children, so until I get them, plans can't crystallize. Once I am with the children, I do various activities to get to know them. I do interest inventories. I do learning style inventories and then I match curriculum and how I should integrate it with specific children. Individualized educational plans need to be developed at that time and yearly plans need to be made. One thing I have found though … I believe that teaching is almost an art form and I can't put into words exactly what it is I am doing … sometimes I do things just because it is best for individual children.

Recognizing the diversity of individual student needs, and accommodating these in the classroom is becoming the teacher's responsibility. One way to do this is through individual education plans based upon current levels of performance, long range goals, short term objectives, interventions, strategies, and resources, and timelines and target dates for progress review. (Boyer & Bandy, 1994, p. 55)

Gloeckler and Simpson pointed out that if teachers "are to accommodate exceptional students in classes and extra curricular activities, they need to achieve a balance between performance expectations and a

sensitivity to individualized differences" (p. 375). An example of this sensitivity to individualized differences was noted in my field notes during a visit to Mr. Bell's classroom.

> As the children write their science test, Mr. Bell constantly wanders about the room monitoring and evaluating. Although he is aware of what everyone is doing, he pays particular attention to Richard (learning disabled student) and to Christopher (visually impaired boy). He often stands by their desks, glancing about the room, but watching to see what the boys are writing. As he walks about he whispers words of encouragement to individuals. Although he has enlarged the print for Christopher, Mr. Bell offers additional help. Besides encouraging Richard, Mr. Bell re-directs or questions Richard when he becomes frustrated or lost. Because Mr. Bell whispers to everyone every now and again, his interactions with Richard and Christopher do not stand out. But make no mistake, he is adapting the testing situation to accommodate for the boys' needs.

Sometimes, strategies that teachers have chosen to individualize programming for students do not always work. Brophy (1979) stated that "if students are having difficulty and are not learning, effective teachers look to themselves to find new teaching approaches" (p. 34). All participants in this

study indicated that there can be times when they need to try a variety of strategies and techniques to help an individual student or students experience success. An example of this is found in a narrative Miss Ross shared with me.

These Books are a Cinch!

For weeks I had been trying to get Alice interested in reading. She had a very high frustration level when it comes to this, so it was kind of like pulling teeth.

I had a "Home Reading" program set up for her, but I found that I wasn't getting the kind of support at home the program required. Next, I tried a "Big Buddy" - a grade six student who would come and read with her every morning, but the grade six student kept forgetting to show up. I was running out of options so I thought of something a bit radical and I wasn't sure how Alice would respond.

My aide was using a particular reading series with my two TMH (Trainable Mentally Handicapped) students and I found that the extreme repetitiveness of the books was really working. I thought the books would be great for Alice, and my aide was up for the challenge of another "pupil," so away they went.

It began rather oddly, because my little reading gang would

always work in secrecy. I could hear hysterical laughter every now and again, but they would never share what they were doing. Until I received the invitation to beat all invitations.

The door opened and Alice hollered, "Miss Ross, ya gotta come out here quick!" Out I went to see these three smiling, and slightly mischievous faces looking up at me. My aide said "OK, let's dazzle her." The next thing I knew they were taking turns reading a page from one of the pattern books they had been practicing - and Alice was leading the pack!

I was so amazed! Not with the fact that Alice was finally reading pattern books, but that she was finally seeing herself as a reader. It really struck home when she came walking into the room with me exclaiming, "Ya know, Miss Ross, these books are a cinch!"

Burden and Byrd (1994) stated that "teachers need to take individual differences into account when teaching. Cognitive, affective, and physical differences need to be considered when designing instructional programs" (p. 255) They went on to explain that individualized instruction does not mean that students work completely on their own time trying to learn from the curriculum. "The teacher will always need to be a personal model, a facilitator, and a guide for student learning" (p. 255).

Teacher as Model.

A teacher stands in front of his class

Belittling and ridiculing his students

For behavior he feels is inappropriate.

Above his head a banner reads:

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Lang and Scarfe (1988) discussed instructor behaviors contributing to group effectiveness. They mention modeling as being an important factor to that end.

> Modeling is the consistent demonstration, by the instructor, of desired behaviors [and attitudes] ... For instance, if trust and openness are desired, the instructor should be trusting and open; if respect and acceptance are aims, the instructor must demonstrate respect and acceptance; if optimism and willingness to try new experiences are expected, then the leader must express optimism and be ready to take risks. It is not enough for an instructor to teach interpersonal skills: he or she must model the desired attitudes (p. 119).

Mr. Bell, when discussing expectations within the classroom,

commented that "when I make a decision that I expect 'this' from the students, or I expect 'that' from the children, then I think I have to model it myself"

> I try my best to be respectful of the students, and I try to think before I react. I try not to put the kids down because I will not tolerate students doing that to each other. So I "walk my talk." It is a decision I have made. It is a pledge. The students model what they see.

Miss Ross suggested that modeling appropriate attitudes and behaviors is a "huge, huge part of how I teach and how the school runs." She spoke about older students modeling for younger students. "Because I teach a split grade, I have already spent a year with some of these students, so they know what to expect in terms of behaviors and choices and such, and they model it for the new students." She went on to add that:

> This class is mind boggling in terms of the respect and kindness they show towards the learning disabled students. I think some of it has to do with the way these kids are, but some of it has to do with the modeling. They see how I treat the special needs children, and they know how I treat them, and yes they are different, but they are a part of this class, no big deal. And they see that it is OK to help them, and

to help each other, for that matter, and that they are very good at helping each other out.

The overall acceptance in this classroom was obvious from my first visit. The trainable mentally handicapped students, Alice, the moderate learning disabled youngster, and the English as a Second Language students were invited into all activities with equal enthusiasm as were the "regular" students. This was recorded in my field notes during a physical education class that was taking place outside.

Some students begin forming a "train" by placing hoops around the waist of the person in front of them. They begin to demonstrate real "team work" as they run up and down a hill. Soon there are 7 children participating. Soon more children are drawn to the game of "Choo-choo" and as they run by, Miss Ross smiles and offers some words of encouragement. Alice and Chris and Barbara (all learning disabled students) begin to form their own train. A little girl from the bigger group runs over and invites them to join the big train. Eventually there are 13 students forming the train. They "chug" their way past the teacher aide who smiles and joins the back of the train with the same enthusiasm that many of the children share. Miss Ross comes over and joins me. (I have been sitting on the steps of a portable observing

and taking notes). She explains that "this is the most amazing class I have ever had because they are so accepting of everybody." Watching the "Choo-choo" train chug by, with all the happy faces, it is evident that the students are truly accepting of each other. But why? Could one reason be that it is modeled by staff in the school? I would venture to say that indeed modeling plays a significant role in this school and in this classroom.

Biklen, Corrigan and Quick (1989) also agreed that teachers are very important role models (p. 217). Mrs. Hardy also recognized that modeling is important. Her realization that by modeling she instills a social conscience in her children was illustrated in a narrative she shared with me.

A Million Bucks!

As a person, I've always felt that it was so important to treat people with respect and dignity and hopefully, you might receive some in return. I've carried this into my teaching and make a sincere effort to practice it every day with my students. It has paid off!

Working in the inner city opened my eyes to many things. When I looked at some of the family backgrounds my students come from and the kind of conditions they lived in, I knew I had my work cut out for me. Sometimes it wasn't easy. There were hard lessons to

learn for both the students and myself.

One morning I had left a quarter on the corner of my desk (the reason for which escapes me now), and by recess it had mysteriously disappeared. I looked around my desk, truly expecting it to pop up. When it didn't, the terrible thought that it might actually have been taken occurred to me. I didn't want to believe that one of my students would even think of doing such a thing because … they *respected* me … or I thought they did.

So, I crawled up on my little soap box and gave my little sermon about stealing. I spoke very quietly and I knew that both my voice and my eyes made my feelings known. I was hurt.

At the end of the day, a group of my little "ragamuffins" stayed to help and to chat with me which was a daily routine. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Binh, one of my grade two students. He was walking slowly around the class, his eyes downcast, his hands stuffed in his pockets. He was obviously troubled.

"Hey Binford! What's up?" I asked trying to lighten his mood.

He lifted his eyes, tears pooling as he slowly walked over to me. His little mouth moved but no words came out. Binh took my hand, opened it and gently put the quarter inside before closing it again.

As tears rolled down his checks, I said, "Thank you."

He jumped into my arms and sobbed, "I'm so sorry I hurt you. I

love you as much as you love me. I'm sorry."

I was overwhelmed. I had never said "I love you" to my students but somehow, Binh got that message. And the message Binh gave me was that he trusted and respected me as much as any little boy could.

That quarter in my hand felt like a million bucks!

Modeling, although important in terms of demonstrating behavioral expectations, can also be used to foster understanding of a concept. Hunter (1987) in her book, "Mastery Teaching" dedicates a chapter to modeling. She suggested that "seeing, hearing, or feeling a model of 'what is meant' can become a tremendous assist to understanding" (p. 45). Modeling what you mean is very important. Ornstein (1990) stated that modeling may take the form of a teacher identifying the skill required and showing how it is used. "In effect, the teacher 'shares a cognitive secret' of how to execute a strategy" (p. 38). This can be as simple as demonstrating the proper stretching technique. This was recorded in my field notes.

Before heading outside for a game of soccer, Mrs. Hardy explained that it is important to stretch before beginning to exercise. As the class arrived on the soccer field many students begin to "stretch" if you can call their half-hearted attempts as stretching. When Mrs.

> Hardy arrives she enthusiastically demonstrates the proper stretching procedures and reviews why stretching is so important. Knowing that Mrs. Hardy is a runner, and therefore believing her to be "expert," the students seem to appreciate that the techniques she is modeling are legitimate and most begin to stretch with new found enthusiasm.

Jackson (1986) emphasized that "no attitude, interest, or value can be taught except by the teacher who himself or herself believes in, cares for, or cherishes whatever it is that he or she holds out for emulation" (p. 124). Mrs. Drake's obvious love of literature was contagious as my field notes indicated. "As the children begin to clear their desks to get ready for a Language Arts lesson, Mrs. Drake introduces the lesson by saying 'this is one of my *most favorite* books in the *whole world!*' Heads pop up. She has the students … they are focused."

> Whether teachers' behavior is exemplary or poor or whether they attempt to withdraw from the model role and be noncommittal, their behavior remains a model. Students learn poor behavior in the same way they learn acceptable behavior … therefore teachers must be aware of their own behavior and its effects … teachers who assume a "do-as-I-say-not-as-I-do" attitude may find students …[to be] resentful and uncooperative (Glockler & Simpson, 1988, pp. 140-141).

Burden and Byrd (1994) suggested that students must be involved in the learning process. They explained that students may become bored and restless during periods of passive learning, but will be stimulated when actively and emotionally involved in their own learning. "Misbehavior is also significantly less during lessons that involve students in using higher levels of cognitive skills, incorporating their feelings and relating material to their own lives" (p.266). They referred to Goodlad's (1984) study that found that across all grade levels, teachers talked three times as much as students. "It is common to have uninvolved students who listen to a teacher or who are involved in seatwork" for a good portion of their day (p. 266).

Findings from this study demonstrated that the exemplary teachers who participated, believe that students should be actively involved in their learning and should be given opportunity, whenever possible, to make decisions about their learning.

He sits there bored to tears

and thinks

"If I have to do more of these I'll scream!"

But then his teacher says,

"Put away your books, roll up your sleeves

It's time for science .

Get into your small groups and

remember,

The sky is the limit!"

Empowering Students. The exemplary teachers in this study want to assist students to learn to take direction for their own learning and actions which will have a positive impact on the students' future.

> The goal of effective teaching is usually higher student achievement. In most school districts, student achievement is measured by standardized tests, but there is an additional, more intangible component to effective teaching that cannot be measured by a standardized test. Good teachers usually bolster students' self-esteem and spark a love of learning. That is an area hard to define through pre and post tests. However, it is important today since education must be a life-long process. Students whose teachers inspire in them a love of learning will always be ready to study a new field and make necessary career changes ... in this way effective teachers have a major impact on students' futures (Demmon-Berger, 1986, pp. 2-3).

As the year goes on, Mrs. Hardy changes her teaching approach. She

believes that she must first establish clear expectations for both learning and behavior, but once expectations are in order, she must begin to empower students to assume responsibility. She commented:

> If you take a look at my teaching philosophy ... I would like to think that at this time of the year [April] I don't stand up front and teach as much as I did at the beginning of the year. I would like to think of myself, at this time, as more of a facilitator. There is a lot of group work or independent work. So my expectation or goal is that students are being responsible for their own learning. I am empowering them. That is reflected in the way I teach. The expectations ... there are still the high behavior and learning expectations from before, but there are different instructional strategies and objectives now. Now the students can begin taking over. That's the best thing I can do for them ... The smartest thing a teacher can do is to empower her students. That is what it is all about. That is the bottom line as far as I am concerned!

As was mentioned earlier, Mrs. Drake believes that her job is to empower her students. Underlying all decisions is the notion that students need to be empowered in order to take control of their lives. Mrs. Drake spoke of an incident in which her students took initiative.

> When the last report card went out, the students were concerned about the comments the math teacher had made. They were disappointed that they had all received the very same comment and yet different marks. The level of trust was shaken. And I have empowered them because they immediately wrote down what they were upset with and sent a delegation to go and talk to the principal. It was very interesting to watch the children initiate this. But many of their concerns were founded in excellent thinking and in maximizing the learning.

Charles and Senter (1995) suggested that "the teacher is responsible for communicating the sort of psychosocial environment desired, initiating the conditions that lead to it, and maintaining a good environment once it is achieved" (p. 61). This was demonstrated in the field notes in an entry I made while visiting Mr. Bell's classroom.

> The atmosphere in the classroom is bright and child-centered. Students and teacher alike spend a great deal of time smiling, and humor seems to play a vital role. Mr. Bell appears to be very approachable, and students do not seem to hesitate to seek him out if they have questions or concerns. Although Mr. Bell maintains a very warm and caring environment, there is an unmistakable element of

> firm discipline in his class. There is structure and routine, but there is also flexibility. Clearly, Mr. Bell is in control, yet one cannot help but sense that the students have a voice in decisions that are made in the classroom … There is a tremendous amount of student movement … Students seem to be coming and going all the time … While observing, it became evident that the students have a sense of ownership. Although Mr. Bell is the "captain" of the ship, students happily determine their own course.

Hare (1993) stated that the caring teacher is anxious for the student to develop as a student, but also as a person, "becoming capable of autonomous and critical reflection, someone who cares for other people and for certain ideas and ideals … A caring teacher has respect … for the students as potentially an equal … (pp. 111-112). Mrs. Drake was adamant that teacher attitude is fundamental in empowering students.

> I think attitude is key. I have seen teachers that have tremendous knowledge and tremendous skill, but seem to behave as robots. They don't seem to have the dedication or the commitment to make the children believe that they care about them and believe in them … and that I think that is basic to teaching … That once children know that the teacher cares and believes in them, they can start believing in

themselves, if they don't already … to begin to gain necessary skills. I also believe that … it means inviting criticism, showing how learning from ones own mistakes happens. But it eliminates the gap between teacher as being the "all knowing, all powerful" one and children as being subservient. And I cannot accept that.

Mrs. Drake's commitment to empowering her students was evident in an observation that was detailed in the field notes. She was beginning to plan for the next novel study, and she wanted to have student input before finalizing the plans.

Mrs. Drake calls the students to the carpet to discuss the new novel study. "I would like you to tell me what you liked about the last novel study, what you thought worked well for you, and what you would like to see happen during this next novel study." The students are keen to share their opinions. They talk about things like a "character journal" in which they journal as if they were the main character of the story … Together they plan activities that they will do during the novel study … One activity that they have agreed on is a cover page. Mrs. Drake holds up examples of cover pages from a previous class. They discuss what it will take to get an "A" on the cover of their novel study. The discussion is inspiring because the children are taking the

> initiative and providing rationale for what they believe an "A" effort is. Now the responsibility for an excellent mark rests solely on the students. They are well aware what is expected of them. Excellent learning is taking place!

Some educational researchers argue that students who are given opportunity to become actively involved in making decisions about their own learning, to be self-empowered, often surpass learning and behavioral expectations (Good, 1975; Glasser, 1990; Lamperes, 1994). Miss Ross explained that "giving students the opportunity to make their own decisions and goals about their learning is very important."

> They learn that when they set a goal they must follow it through. Even though they are very young [grades 1 and 2] they should be given choices about the things that they do, where they have to make a conscience choice about what it is they are going to do, why they are doing it, and what they are going to get out of it … thereby empowering them in their own learning … and teaching them the very basics about being responsible for their own learning and their own actions. That is so important!

He tells me to get up when I want to get down

Or to walk when I want to run.

He tells me NO!

When will he let me decide?

Doesn't he want me to learn?

Effects of Actions and Interactions

The five exemplary teachers in this study share similar qualities and beliefs. Their actions and interactions with students suggested that they adapt programming to meet individual needs, model appropriate behavior and learning strategies and empower students to assume responsibility for their own learning and actions. As a result, similar effects of their teaching actions and interactions have been noted. By recognizing the importance of the student-teacher relationship they begin building a partnership which fosters student development to full potential. They also take time to affirm successes.

Building a Partnership. The exemplary teachers in this study believe that teaching is not a "me versus them" prospect. All participants agreed that teaching is not competitive, but rather teaching means reaching children and forming a partnership with them.

For every one person who wants to teach

There are approximately 30 who don't want to learn.

(Lamb, 1990, p. 286)

Although meant to be humorous, the above quotation implies that teaching and learning requires commitment and effort from both teacher and student. To suggest that if teachers teach, students will learn is over-simplifying the interdependence of the student-teacher relationship. Effective teachers recognize that besides students' interest in learning, fostering a positive student-teacher relationship also fosters academic, social, and emotional growth.

> A significant body of research indicates that academic achievement and students' behavior are influenced by the quality of the teacher-student relationship ... Students prefer teachers who are warm and friendly. Positive teacher-student relationships are associated with more positive student responses to school and with increased academic achievement. Students who feel liked by their teachers have been reported to have higher academic achievement and more productive classroom behavior than students who feel their teachers held them in low regard (Burden & Byrd, 1994, p. 178).

Burden and Byrd (1994) argued that teachers must systematically build better relationships with students. They stated that teachers must express an interest in and a concern for students by "(a) monitoring the quality of their relationships with students, with a focus on maintaining a high rate of positive comments; (b) creating opportunities for personal discussions with students; and (c) demonstrating their interest in activities that are important to students" (p. 178).

Clearly, the exemplary teachers in this study demonstrated that they hold the students in high esteem. The five participants, were always careful to deal with students in a positive, but honest way. Mr. Bell demonstrated this time and time again as he walked about his classroom whispering words of encouragement to individuals. This happened during the science test, but it also happened when he stood up at the front of the classroom to acknowledge the whole class for a job well done. "I appreciate the exceptional job you did in the library." Like all participants in this study, Mrs. Drake emphasized that she holds students in high regard with positive remarks in the classroom. "That is an excellent point." "Wonderful observation." "You are really taking the time to think this through and I really appreciate that." But she also emphasized her regard for students with her written comments in report cards. This was evident in my field notes.

I had asked to see a copy of a report card and Mrs. Drake brought me two. I was impressed with Mrs. Drake's honest and positive remarks. For example, she had written "YOU ARE MAKING GREAT LEARNING CHOICES, GORD. Now, I need good behavior choices too." (She capitalized what she wanted to stand out). I also noticed that Mrs. Drake's grade level assessment was more accurate than the math teacher's. Gord had been rated at grade 5 level of achievement in math, meeting acceptable standards, but the comments indicated that he is experiencing real difficulty. Mrs. Drake wants Gord to know exactly where he is.

In addition to maintaining honest, positive feedback to students, the five participants interact informally with their students. During visits to participants' classrooms, children frequently came in before the bell rang in the morning, stayed in at recess or lunch time, or stayed late after school to visit with the teachers. The teachers, for the most part, were happy to interact informally with the students. It was not a question of "There's the bell, here's your hat." Rather, it was more a question of "What's been happening with you lately?" An example of this was noted in the field notes.

Some students just want to stay in the classroom. They are in no hurry to go outside to play, even though it is a perfect spring day. No,

they want to stay in and help their teacher. They would rather sort papers and cut out pictures while they talk to their teacher then to go out and play with peers … But then again, look how much fun they are having staying right where they are.

The five participants in this study also build up the student-teacher relationship by becoming involved in the extra-curricular activities of students. The relationship with their students quite often goes beyond the walls of the classroom. This is demonstrated in a excerpt from the field notes.

Mr. Bell looks tired this morning. He explains that he had arrived to school at 6:15 am because he needed to enlarge the print on some handouts for his blind student, and that he wanted to spend time organizing the hot dog day he was hosting for the school later on in the week. Mr. Bell adds that he had been to a city-wide race with some students from the running club the evening before. "We didn't get out of there until close to 10 pm." No wonder he is tired! We talk about his extra-curricular responsibilities. He smiles and suggests that he is "Mr. Extra Curricular!" He explains that he believes that students need the extras at school and so he gets involved. He states that not many teachers at his school seem to want to get involved, so he does. He organizes and manages the School Patrols, intramural

program, and the running club. All of these take considerable teacher time and run for the majority of the school year. Although hot dog days are a "once in a while" activity, Mr. Bell points out that they take considerable organizing and are somewhat "high stress." When I ask him if he is angry that so much is "put on his plate" he smiles and shrugs and says "not really." "If I didn't do these things, I'm not sure they would get done. But aside from that, I enjoy it. The kids need these extra things in their lives. I get to know the kids on a different level, and they get to know me a little better. I'm happy to do it."

Besides developing the student-teacher relationship on various levels, is the recognition that, quite simply put, teachers need students and students need teachers. An interdependence develops as a result of the construct of the classroom. Clearly, students and teacher are the essential ingredients. As one of the participants noted, "I am just one of the characters in this drama. Together, the students and I, determine how the performance will turn out." During an informal conversation, Mr. Bell noted:

> I have been thinking about what it is I do … and I have come to the conclusion that I am not a teacher in the sense that I get up there and lecture or that I "push" learning on the kids. No, I have come to realize that words like facilitator, or mediator are better descriptors …

My role is to find the method that best suits each student. Find the method which will enable the student to learn for themselves, because that is quality learning … not me spoon feeding the information in. But I cannot find the best method on my own. It is found by communicating and working with the student. We form a partnership … a learning partnership, if you will, that helps us meet our goals and be successful.

Burden and Byrd, 1990, stated that students need to experience success. "Successful experiences are instrumental in developing feelings of self-worth and confidence in attempting new activities. Furthermore, student learning is increased when they experience success" (p. 121). During selective coding described in Chapter 4, affirmation of successes became the core category. This affirmation of success, that what teacher and student are doing together, seems to be the reason for exemplary teaching.

Affirmation of Successes.

At the same time,

In the eyes of teachers,

the classroom can be seen as a combination

of many masterpieces,

each learner being one of them in his or her entirety;

each one learning to play and learn at his or her own pace;

and each one respected and acknowledged

for the learning or performance

he or she demonstrates

(Geddert, 1992, p. 1).

Ornstein (1990) pointed out that "the road to positive self-worth and to success begins with a good relationship with people who care" (p. 77). Miss Evans recognized this and agreed with Ornstein's (1990) suggestion that "for some students school may be the only place where they meet people who genuinely care for them" (p. 77).

> Hopefully I am giving the children some self-esteem. Hopefully I am reacting to them in a positive way ... that I am reacting to their problems in the right way. If he spills something, he spills something. No big deal. He doesn't need to be yelled at or ridiculed. He gets that at home. I hope that I am gentle enough, so that they know its OK if they make mistakes ... and I hope that I am teaching the kids and their families to celebrate successes. To be able to say "WOW! I did that." To recognize and celebrate their learning so that the children can continue to learn.

Geddert (1992) pointed out that teachers' beliefs guide their actions in the classroom.

> What do teachers' actions "tell" students? When teachers provide a learning environment that is rich with opportunities to explore, create, design, and solve problems related to real life, the message the child receives is that exploring, creating, designing and problem solving are important! Another message received is that all children can be active and successful participants in this exciting venture of learning (p. 8).

Clearly, the teachers participating in this research are guided by beliefs that hold education, teaching, and students as important and communicate these beliefs in all that they say and do. They believe that all students can learn and that all students can experience successes as they develop to their full potential. Students of these exemplary teachers experience academic, social and emotional successes because they respond to the beliefs these teachers inherently communicate about learning.

An example of this affirmation of success was noted in the field notes during a visit to Miss Evans' classroom. As the children worked on a poster depicting Canada, Miss Evans walked about directing and encouraging students.

As Miss Evans walks about she is constantly praising children for work well done. If she has to direct students to do something, she begins by complementing them on something they have done well. "Excellent choice of colors, Aaron." "Chrissy, I just love the way you have highlighted the word 'Canada' at the top of the page." As she walks about she is evaluating the students' progress and their efforts. She notices Charley, a special needs boy, working diligently. As she walks towards his desk, she smiles. "Oh Charley! That is wonderful! That is the best I have ever seen you do. It is gorgeous!" Charley is thrilled with his teacher's reaction to his efforts. As Miss Evans turns and walks away Charley sits up tall, looks up, and exclaims to no one in particular, "I am so happy, happy, happy!" Student success has been recognized and teacher and student have shared in the experience!

Mr. Bell shared a narrative that captured this notion of affirmation of successes.

You Can Lead A Horse To Water

As time is measured in seconds, minutes, hours, and so on, and as the chronology of humankind is captured in historically

significant events, surely the careers of teachers must be calibrated in his or her students' successes … I realize that I am able to recall events throughout my career that have circumscribed exactly what it means to me to be a teacher. One of those defining moments involves a horse that was led to water.

As puzzles go, the putting-the-pieces-together aspect of teaching unravels eventfully and meaningfully. One crucial angle to this pedagogical process revealed itself to me during my involvement with John, a special needs student in my grade six class. The year began as most do with excitement, anticipation, foresight, and in this particular year, ignorance and trepidation on the part of the teacher. Never before have I had a student with this type of need; never before have I had to trust that the "big picture" would unfold as the year went on, eventually revealing great and wonderful events. Never before had my prognostications been so accurate.

He crept in to the classroom on Day One, bringing with him all the tools that defined him as a student: a submissive demeanor, a shy disposition, body language that spoke of low self esteem, and a grade four mathematics text book. He quietly hid at his desk, and as the day wore on willfully became part of the woodwork. I left it at that, content in the knowledge that he had survived this day, and realizing that I would make an effort to become familiar with this student and his

capabilities in the weeks and months to come. In June, John completed the year at a site 180 degrees from where he was in September. He was outgoing, involved, full of confidence, and ready to meet any challenge that awaited him.

John had grown immensely within his own zone of proximal growth. His capabilities became abilities. His reluctance to partake in school, whether it was classroom discussions, small group work, physical education, or even independent work dissipated as the school year wore on. It was gradual and systematic, but by the end of the school year, John had achieved great and wonderful things. With every success and accomplishment, both large and small, came celebration.

Perhaps there is nothing elementary that to be an "armchair coach." Aided with the gift of hindsight, the ability to sit back and critique a certain play is relatively effortless. At this point it is practically cynical to look back and state that "I knew he could do it!" Yet, I "knew" early in the going that this young man was capable of much more than was indicated in previous progress reports and within his own performance. Fortunately, John proved me to be correct in my assumptions, keeping my ability as a sage intact. What accomplishments he achieved throughout the school year were his and his alone. His determination and willingness to take on Everest-

like challenges were truly inspirational. My role was a relatively simple one. I offered John the room to grow, to attempt activities that his classmates were trying, to invite him to experience learning for himself, to challenge him to grow through these experiences, and to celebrate with him as he realized his dreams. I simply pointed him to the water, it was John who drank it all in.

Just before he left the class at the end of the school year, John passed in his grade six mathematics text book.

It was during this school year that I came to redefine my position within the classroom. I realize now that I am not so much a teacher of knowledge and skills, but I am someone who guides students to paths where they are able to learn for themselves and to acknowledge their accomplishments.

"It feels good to succeed and it translates into every part of life, social and academic. Students who feel good about themselves will succeed" (Geddert, 1992, p. 47). And as Mrs. Drake stated, when students succeed, she succeeds. "Their excitement is my excitement. Their success is my success!"

You look at me

And believe.

You work with me

And help me grow.

You smile

And believe

That I can be all that I can be.

Chapter Summary

Following a qualitative, phenomenological analysis, this chapter provided the "rich description" of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms. By presenting the participating teachers' stories, in their own words, and by describing the events that took place in their classrooms from field notes taken during visits, a picture of an exemplary teacher emerges. Poetry, quotations, and references from educational literature helped to add detail to the portrait of an exceptionally competent teacher mainstreaming special needs students into a regular classroom.

Qualities of exemplary teachers were highlighted along with their beliefs about education, school, teaching, students as people, and the student-teacher relationship. Their actions and interactions were described, specifically that of adapting to meet individual needs, modeling appropriate behaviors and learning strategies, and empowering students to assume responsibility for their own learning and actions. Effects of their actions and

interactions, that of building a partnership and affirmation of successes, were highlighted, with affirmation of successes as the core variable linking all other categories to the practice of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms.

The findings from Chapter Four and Chapter Five, when blended together, present a dramatic view of exemplary teaching. Like Perry (1994), I sometimes found it difficult to pigeonhole a story or an event into one theme or category. Ornstein (1991) stated that "the more we consider teaching as an art, packed with emotions, feelings, and excitments, the more difficult it is to derive rules or generalizations" (p. 68). Each story or event often described both actions of exemplary teaching or effects of those actions. Often it was difficult of decide if the actions lead to the effects because the effects often influenced the actions. For example, adapting programming to meet individual needs often resulted in affirmation of successes, but the affirmation of success often reinforced the fact that the adaptation was working and would continue to do so. Therefore the success inspired the teacher to use the adaptation with other students experiencing similar difficulties or to alter it slightly to meet another need.

However, the reader is invited to make decisions about the narratives and to go beyond what has been reported. For it is the realization that it is a combination of many variables that help define the nature of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms. The

following chapter will offer further insights into exemplary teaching. These additional insights, when blended with the findings reported in Chapters Four and Five, will illuminate further the essence of exemplary teaching.

Chapter 6

Concluding Insights and Questions for Further Investigation

Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this research was to answer the question: What are the characteristics of exemplary teachers who successfully integrate students with mild to moderate learning disabilities into regular classrooms so that the special needs students experience positive social, emotional, and academic growth? Data were gathered by employing observations, semi-structured interviews and written narrative exchanges with five teachers who were considered by peers to be exemplary at mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms.

Patterning my approach after the work done by Perry (1994), I employed two methods of analysis, grounded theory and phenomenology in an attempt to shed light on the essence of exemplary teaching. Subtleties which were overlooked by one method of analysis would be picked up by the other. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) three levels of grounded theory analysis, open, axial, and selective coding, were used to provide analysis at a more conceptual level. The phenomenological approach, described as much as possible, the "lived experiences" of the exemplary teachers participating in this study and fostered a richer description of the nature of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms. As

Perry (1994) pointed out, by blending together these two methodologies a more accurate portrait emerged than would by relying on any single approach (p. 308).

Included in this chapter will be concluding insights and in keeping with the style of this thesis, every insight will feature a poem, a quotation, an excerpt from the field notes, or a quote from educational literature. Questions for further investigation will also be presented. A summary statement will follow. Finally, I will share personal reflections and concerns.

Concluding Insights

Though we use the same books,

Cover the same concepts,

You inspire and

You transform your students.

You truly are a teacher.

Teaching: There is More to it Than Meets the Eye. As this research progressed, it became evident that it would be difficult to capture and communicate the essence of exemplary teaching. The review of the literature suggested that effective teaching is elusive and impossible to define. Although educational researchers have attempted to draw up a definitive inventory of teaching characteristics that guarantees effective teaching, such

a list has never been realized (Cruickshank, 1986; Hawryluk, 1986; Ornstien, 1993). I refer back to a quotation by Ornstein (1991). "The more we consider teaching as an art, packed with emotions, feelings, and excitments, the more difficult it is to derive rules or generalizations" (p.68).

Effective teaching is difficult to define, yet it is recognizable. There are teachers who stand out as extraordinary and whose students experience greater levels of successes. The participants in this study were identified by their peers as being exemplary at integrating special needs students into regular classrooms. But why are these teachers exemplary? What characteristics do they demonstrate that set them apart from other teachers?

Findings in Chapter Four suggested that exemplary teachers share similar qualities. For example, the participants in this study are all child-oriented. They are knowledgeable, well organized, firm yet flexible. But there are many other teachers who share these qualities, who are not considered to be exemplary. Clearly, qualities alone do not define exemplary teaching.

Perry (1994) suggested that the difference between competent nursing and exceptionally competent nursing results from the beliefs and values that underlay the nurses' actions (p. 309). I would suggest that like the exceptionally competent nurses, the exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classes are also motivated by a teaching philosophy that is deeply rooted in the belief that all children are worthy of a quality educational experience. Therefore, exemplary teachers adapt

programming to meet individual needs, model appropriate behaviors and learning techniques, and empower students to assume responsibility for their own learning actions. Exemplary teachers build partnerships and affirm successes based on individual expectations. Yet, to describe exemplary teaching solely in those terms does not take in to account the subtleties of the nature of exemplary teaching.

The participants in this study demonstrated concrete teaching skills. They were adept at developing long range plans as well as preparing orderly daily lesson plans. Daily agendas were displayed and reasonable expectations were always made clear. These exemplary teachers provided appropriate learning materials and were excellent at presenting stimulating and enriching lessons. They offered a variety of programming to meet individual needs and so on.

The "big," obvious things that teachers do to nurture learning were well in place, and of course need to be in place to foster effective teaching. Yet, what became increasingly clear to me was that these exemplary teachers also did many "little, " less obvious things. It seemed that it was these "little" teaching subtleties that truly captured the essence of exemplary teaching.

This was made clear by the personal way the five participants went about their teaching. For example, Mr. Bell used humor to motivate, evaluate, or to re-direct inappropriate behavior while Mrs. Drake used her gentleness and honesty to guide or enrich a learning experience. Mrs. Hardy used her friendly, outgoing personality to manage and motivate an energetic

grade six class while Miss Ross non-verbally communicated an acceptance and appreciation of all her students and let everyone know that she was there to assist them. This was apparent by the way Miss Evans sincerely complimented her second and third graders and in the trust their teacher displayed towards each student.

These "little" less obvious teaching subtleties, were consistently demonstrated by the participants and communicated to each student that, above all else, their teacher cared about them. This notion that the act of teaching is the "personal touch" has been summarized on a plaque that was given to me as a gift. It read:

Teaching is a work of "heart!"

Exemplary Teaching Benefits Everyone. A second aspect of exemplary teaching that became increasingly clear is that the teaching strategies and techniques employed by exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms benefit all students, special needs, "regular," and gifted. What exemplary teachers do to facilitate the best learning experience for special needs students they do for all students.

The participants in this study adapt programming to meet all students' needs, not just the children who have been classified as learning disabled. They model appropriate behavior and learning techniques for all to see and they empower all their students to assume responsibility for their learning and

for their actions. The teachers in this study build partnerships with every student and they celebrate and affirm everyone's successes according to individual expectations.

As the study progressed, I found that observing the interactions between participants and all their students, added valuable information about mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms. This was illustrated in a excerpt from the field notes.

> Mrs. Drake has grouped her class to accommodate everyone's needs. Special needs students are mixed in with regular students and with gifted students. The students are able to help each other. Peer tutoring is obvious. It is not a question of the "Eagles" over here, the "Bluebirds" here, and the "Crows" here. No one feels isolated or left out. She has strategically placed individual students in locations which will benefit, not only them, but others as well. As Mrs. Drake circulates about the room, helping or encouraging individuals, she "invisibly" helps and encourages others who are nearby.

<u>It is Not Just Teaching. It is an Attitude</u>.

The worst sin towards our fellow creatures

is not to hate them,

but to be indifferent to them;

that is the essence of inhumanity.

(Culliver, 1991, p. 175)

Thousand and Villa (1990) told the story of one teacher who chose to have a special needs student with a moderate handicap in her classroom. When asked why she had agreed to this, she responded by saying:

> I, as a teacher, have no right to limit the possible potential of this child. No one knows his limits. I like to think of (this student) as having no limits. Anything is possible for him. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to grow into a new direction by having him in my classroom. I am learning and adapting along with the other students, accepting and believing that everyone is special. (p. 270)

What I found when observing and talking to the participants, was that unless I specifically asked about the special needs students, quite often the teachers did not distinguish the special needs students from the "regular" students in the class. Although the teachers were well aware of the very specific needs of the classified students, they did not seem to view these children any differently from the other students in the room. This realization was noted in the field notes during a visit to Mr. Bell's classroom.

> Mr. Bell describes his class as "regular" even though he has one student who is classified as moderately learning disabled, one student who is legally blind, and four students who are funded as gifted. "I believe that my class is very similar to many grade six classes in the system. It is an 'average' class with some 'not-so-average' students. Clearly, I have to provide a grade six program that will meet the needs of all my students, just like every other grade six teacher. I do that by programming to meet the needs of all my students" Mr. Bell is reluctant to distinguish between his special needs students and his regular students. It seems to me that he views all his students as "special."

When conversing with all participants, I often had to ask specific questions about specific special needs students. The attitude of these exemplary teachers seemed to be deeply rooted in the acceptance of all children. These exemplary teachers demonstrated a belief that they can offer quality educational experiences to all their students. There was no evidence of favoritism or prejudice. Mrs. Drake commented:

> I think a lot of that has to do with attitude. Knowledge and skills can be taught so well, but attitude can't be. I suppose I may have been born a teacher without realizing it … I have seen teachers who have tremendous knowledge and tremendous skill, but seem to behave as

> robots … you have to have an attitude that will always motivate you to do what is best for children.

Teaching is Believing. Exemplary teachers believe that all children can learn and grow and develop to their full potential.

> Recently, a teacher was asked to explain the radiant look on her face. Without hesitation, she began to explain that her teaching vigor was a result of her renewed belief that all students can learn. She said, "When students do not demonstrate success immediately, it is not failure, they just haven't experienced it yet. (Geddert, 1992, p.44)

Mrs. Drake summarized the importance of teacher belief when she said, "Teachers need to believe in their students so that students can begin to believe in themselves. That belief is fundamental to the teaching/learning process and is the basis for meeting the needs of individual children."

Many teachers recognize their impact within the learning environment. They realize that their choice of lesson plans, the presentation of those lessons, and the manner in which they evaluate student learning plays a significant role in education. However, many of these same teachers do not realize that students respond to the beliefs teachers inherently communicate about learning. This "little" subtlety was not overlooked by the participants in this study. These exemplary teachers communicated everyday, to every child,

their belief that everyone can succeed.

Every child can learn! That powerful belief statement seemed to motivate the exemplary teachers in this study. To this observer, that message seemed to determine much of the success of these exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms. It became increasingly clear that this basic belief is fundamental to successful inclusive educational experiences for all students and their teachers.

Try, my Little One, try,

Because without effort

There is no hope.

Try, my Little One, try,

You can reach

For the sky.

Try, my Little One, try,

Because I believe

In you.

Try, my Little One, try,

And soar

To new heights.

To Teach is To Learn. All teachers in this study emphasized that teaching is an evolving process. Mrs. Drake stated that "I am continualiy learning new strategies and throwing old ones out. I am constantly becoming more skilled. Moving ... evolving. I don't know the teacher I will be when I retire." She went on to add that:

> I know the teacher I want to be based on the kind of teachers I had ... teachers who upset me, and squashed me, and made me very timid ... well I think, for me, teaching is a constant commitment to learning. I attend many workshops and conferences. I read about education in different countries and about styles of education and then put it all together. Like a symphony or a piece of art. The pieces just fit, but I can't always articulate why.

Miss Ross also expressed a commitment to learning. She stated that:

> The more I teach, the more I know that I don't know everything there is to know. I still want to learn about children, about development, about teaching styles, all those sorts of things. I have learned an incredible amount since I started teaching, but again, I realize that I have a lot to learn and I want to know more. So life-long learning is important to me, both personally and professionally. I let the children know it and I model

the desire to continue learning and hopefully this will rub off on my students.

In summary, the nature of exemplary teachers integrating special needs students is complicated and difficult to communicate. As was pointed out in Chapter Five, "to conduct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the life world, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex that an explication of meaning can reveal" is attempting the impossible (van Manen, 1990, p. 18). However, despite the difficulty, I believe many important discoveries were made capturing the essence of exemplary teaching. Along with the findings which were reported in Chapters Four and Five, some additional insights emerged which further explain the nature of exemplary teaching.

These insights included the importance of the "little," iess obvious things that exemplary teachers do when teaching. These teaching subtleties might be called the "personal touch" or the "art" of teaching and seemed to truly capture the essence of exemplary teaching. A second insight was that what exemplary teachers do for special needs students, they do for all students. It became apparent that exemplary teachers view all their students as "special." Furthermore, exemplary teachers demonstrate an attitude of acceptance that all children are worthy of a quality educational experience. In addition, exemplary teachers believe that all students can learn and grow and reach their full potential. Finally, exemplary teachers view their teaching as an evolving

process. They describe themselves as life-long learners and are committed to achieving standards of excellence in the delivery of services for students.

Significance of Insights and Questions for Further Investigation

One cannot deny the humanness of the teaching/learning experience. The results of this research suggest that the essence of exemplary teaching is multi-dimensional. There are human qualities involved such as patience, tolerance, creativity, and resourcefulness. There are underlying beliefs that motivate teachers to act and interact in specific ways and there are effects from those actions and interactions. Furthermore, there are additional subtleties that help define exemplary teaching. These are the human touches, attitudes and beliefs that outstanding teachers use that set them apart from the mainstream.

Clearly many of the "big," obvious skills can be taught. Many student teachers can learn to write acceptable lesson plans, organize a unit of study, design a test, or improve their evaluation and observational skills. But the "little," less obvious skills may be more difficult to teach, if they can be learned at all. Certainly, these subtleties cannot be taught while sitting in a lecture hall. To this observer, it is the less obvious, but very important human touches that are often overlooked in traditional teacher education. Teacher education must recognize the need for a more in depth approach to teacher training.

Perry (1994) suggested that "nursing curricula should include case studies, simulations, and related experiences ... that enable the exploration and development of a nursing philosophy for each novice nurse" (p. 315). I

would suggest that similar opportunities be developed to allow student teachers and new teachers to develop a belief system that allows time for reflection and that allows the novice teacher time to contemplate the humanness of teaching.

As the findings in Chapter Four indicated, modeling is a strategy employed by teachers which fosters learning, both academically and behaviorally in their students. Therefore, student teachers should spend considerable time out in schools and in classrooms, observing and absorbing both the "big" obvious strategies and techniques as well as the "little," less obvious teaching touches. This implies that teachers, who demonstrate expert skills at all levels be used as teacher mentors for student and novice teachers. Current approaches to teacher education should be reevaluated. Questions teacher educators might ask themselves may include the following:

1. Should teacher education be reevaluated to encompass more practical experience? If so, how much time should be spent at the university engaged in theoretical learning, and how much time should be spent out in the schools gaining practical experience?
2. Should student teachers spend more observational time in classrooms? If so what percentage of time should be spent observing before students engage in practice teaching?
3. If teacher mentors facilitate learning the practical aspect of teaching, how long should students stay with a mentor and how

many mentoring experiences should each student have?

In addition, school administrators should recognize the significance of the concluding insights. Harbin (1992) pointed out that interactions between child and teacher present an important factor when considering integration.

> The implications for those administrators responsible for placing special children in the integrated setting are clear. Teachers are not likely to respond in a uniform fashion to all handicapped students. Care must be taken to assess and accommodate the teacher's personality, the student's personality and a combination of the two. (p.180)

Questions school administrators might ask themselves may include the following:

1. What can school administrators do to facilitate positive mainstreaming experiences?
2. Should teacher professional development be spent on issues about inclusive education? If so, should the emphasis be about the benefits of the "personal touch"?
3. Should novice teachers and teachers experiencing less success in an inclusive classroom be given opportunity to observe and learn from exemplary teachers?

4. Should special needs students be "matched" with teachers based on set criteria? If so, what should those criteria be and who should decide on what is an appropriate match?

5. Should integration only happen at schools where there are teachers who demonstrate exceptional skills? If there are no teachers at the school who demonstrate the willingness or the ability to mainstream special needs students, should the policy of inclusive education be abandoned?

Parents of special needs students must also ask themselves questions about the best possible placement for their child. If they realize the importance of the "human touch" in exemplary teaching, or they realize how important it is for the teacher to accept and believe in their child, should they not be searching for just such a teacher?

Clearly, the integration experiences for the special needs students in the classrooms I observed during the course of this study were positive ones. Although all students in the five classes appeared to be happily engaged in a quality educational experience and appeared to like and appreciate their teachers, I was not able to ascertain for certain how many of the "regular" students perceived the inclusive experience. That simply went beyond the scope of the study. However, I believe that research into how inclusive education affects the "regular" student might yield valuable information. Questions for further research may include the following:

1. How do "regular" students perceive inclusive education? Do they benefit from such an experience? If so, what benefits do they perceive they derive from such an experience? If not, what are their concerns?
2. How do "regular" students perceive the mainstreaming experience with teachers who are considered exemplary as compared to perceptions of "regular" students who are with teachers who are not considered exemplary?

The nature of exemplary teaching is an elusive one. Although there are some obvious skills and strategies that need to be in place, it appears that there are many subtle human touches, attitudes and beliefs that set exemplary teachers apart. Many questions for further research have been identified. I also propose that if more research is dedicated to discovering and defining the "little," less obvious teaching touches, a clearer, more encompassing definition of effective teaching might be developed.

Summary Statement

I believe that this study has added to the understanding of the characteristics of exemplary teachers integrating special needs students into regular classrooms so that these students experience positive social, emotional, and academic growth. Analysis of the data obtained during formal observations, semi-structured interviews as well as many informal

conversations, and in the narrative exchanges the participants shared with me revealed, much about exemplary teaching.

Exemplary teaching is complex and difficult to capture. Exemplary teachers share similar qualities and belief systems that underlie their actions and interactions. As a result of these similarities, exemplary teachers engage in similar teaching methods. Specifically, adapting programming is done to ensure that individual needs are being met. In addition, modeling appropriate learning strategies and behavior is done to encourage student growth both academically and socially. Furthermore, teachers empower students to assume responsibility for their own learning and for their own actions so that they can reach their full potential.

As a result of these actions and interactions, exemplary teachers build partnerships with their students. The teaching/learning process becomes more cooperative rather than competitive. There is a sense of shared ownership as student and teacher work towards a common goal. As goals are met and successes are realized there is celebration. This celebration is for successes both large and small. Special needs students who experience academic difficulties will be affirmed for successes at their level. Their steps may be smaller than the leaps taken by regular and gifted students, but successes will be recognized at individual levels, based on individual expectations. This moving forward and the affirmation of successes seems to be the main catalyst that motivates the exemplary teaching practice.

However, additional insights revealed there is more to exemplary

teaching than meets the eye. Although technical teaching skills are necessary, there seems to be a subtle, human dimension to exemplary teaching. These personal teaching touches are essential when defining exemplary teaching. Furthermore, an attitude of acceptance that all students are worthy of a quality educational experience is necessary. In addition, teachers need to believe that all students in their care can grow and develop and reach their full potential.

Exemplary teachers view education, school, students, and the student-teacher relationship as very important. They believe that their profession is paramount. They derive rewards from their teaching experiences and are committed to continuing to learn and grow as they strive to provide excellent delivery of services to all their students.

Although I began by looking at exemplary teachers integrating mild to moderate learning disabled students into the mainstream, it became increasingly clear that through exemplary teaching, teachers are able to successfully integrate a variety of special needs student as well. This became clear as I watched Mr. Bell not only provide an exceptional learning experience for his learning disabled youngster, but for his visually impaired boy as well. This was unmistakable as I watched Mrs. Drake provide quality learning experiences for her gifted students at the same time as providing a meaningful experience for her mild to moderate learning disabled students. This was evident as I watched Miss Ross encourage her Trainable Mentally Handicapped students to reach their full potential while doing the same for her moderately disabled student. It was clear by the way Miss Evans provided

quality programming for so many students with so many learning problems in her inner city classroom and by the way Mrs. Hardy fostered positive learning experiences for all her students in her challenging grade six classroom.

This study has, I believe, made a valuable contribution to the notion that teachers do indeed make a difference. The teachers' stories illustrated the challenges and the successes of mainstreaming special needs students into regular classes. More generally, however, I believe these "lived experiences" help confirm and qualify that exemplary teachers play a very important role within our society. Their impact is undeniable. Furthermore, I believe this study has, to some degree, helped others to understand more fully what it means to live in this world.

Perry (1994) paved the way for this study. She demonstrated a credible and effective approach for collecting, recording, and reporting human services research findings. She showed that blending two credible qualitative methods is a powerful tool. Although this study did not replicate the work done by Perry (1994) in its entirety, I believe that patterning my approach after her work, strengthened the quality of my study.

Although I have presented the research findings and my insights to the best of my ability, it may be that practicing teachers, administrators, teacher educators, or others might glean additional and important insights by reading this document. I am hopeful that this will happen.

What you do,

What you say,

What you are,

May help others

in ways you never know.

Your influence,

Like your shadow,

Extends where you

May never be

(McElroy, 1992, p. 44).

Personal Reflections and Concerns

Special needs students have been my passion for some time now. I realized this the day a colleague stood up in a staff meeting and suggested that all special needs students be placed in portables, outside the main building, in order that the special needs children be kept away from the "regular" students as much as possible. At first I thought she was trying to be humorous. Unfortunately, she was being quite serious. The fact that not all educators view special needs students favorably has come to light several times since then. During a university course, just recently, while pursuing this Master's degree, someone remarked that there are students in junior high who are not yet reading at a grade three level. This caused quite a stir. The person sitting across from me mumbled, "How low do we have to go?" I was horrified!

I have always been of the belief that "we go as low" as we need to go in order to meet the needs of our students.

I am not declaring that we meet the needs of all our students in a regular classroom. That has never been my intention. There are some students who need alternative placements to ensure their needs are met. "Integration of students should be based upon individual needs and on an individual basis" (Putman, Spiegel, & Bruininks, 1995, p. 572). I will argue, however, that whenever possible, if mainstreaming is in the best interest of the child, we should guarantee an integrated setting.

I do believe that many special needs students are mainstreamed successfully, others are not. Questions about why this is so have gnawed at me for quite sometime. Why are some special needs students experiencing success in a regular classrooms while other special needs students, with similar disabilities, are not experiencing the same levels of success? Why do some teachers welcome the opportunity to mainstream special needs children while other teachers do not? What are inclusive classrooms like? Are inclusive classrooms more or less structured than other classrooms? Is there a recipe for successfully integration?

I was having difficulty narrowing my topic until Dr. Frank Peters, my advisor, shared with me a doctoral dissertation entitled "A Description of Exceptionally Competent Nursing Practice." I was encouraged. I believed that by patterning my approach after the work done by Perry (1994), discovery of the characteristics of exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs

students into regular classrooms could be realized. I believed then, and still do now, that findings would result in valuable insights into exemplary teaching.

The road has not always been an easy one. Some difficulties stemmed from my realization that my research could not encompass all that Perry's (1994) doctoral dissertation did. I sometimes felt that the boots I was trying to fill were too big. Yet, at the same time, I felt that my topic was worthwhile and I found this to be uplifting, reassuring and stimulating. The most positive aspect of my journey was the time I spent with the five exemplary teachers doing an exceptional job at mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms. Theirs were the stories to tell, where the essence of exemplary teaching came to light. I have been transformed by those experiences and will forever be grateful.

Yet, I realize that there are limitations to this study. For example, I cannot conclude that these five exemplary teachers will be able to successfully integrate all types of special needs students. Although there was a range of needs in the classrooms I observed, from Trainable Mentally Handicapped to gifted students, there were no profoundly behavior disordered students or multi-handicapped students who might challenge these teachers beyond their capabilities. I can only conclude that these exemplary teachers successfully integrated the special needs students who were presently enrolled in their classes.

I also realize that my study took place in elementary schools. The focus was on grades one to six. Research suggests that integration is more likely to

be successful at the elementary level than at the higher grade levels (Ammer, 1984, p. 19). Are the characteristics that exemplary teachers mainstreaming special needs students at the junior or senior level significantly different, or are they similar to the characteristics of exceptionally competent elementary teachers? Further research would be beneficial.

Despite the limitations and my concerns, I believe that my study does make a contribution. Although the findings from my study are limited by my skills as a researcher, I take comfort knowing that others may arrive at new levels of understanding. In addition, I am hopeful that this research will encourage someone else to delve further into the nature of exemplary teaching and successful inclusive education. There are countless, precious special needs children who may benefit from additional research.

Just recently, I was asked, "How profound are your research findings?" As I thought about it, I realized that my research findings were "profoundly simple." Exemplary *teaching* is *reaching* a child. Exemplary teaching truly is *"a work of the heart."*

A Story

Giants, Wizards and Dwarfs was the game to play.

Being left in charge of about eighty seven to ten year olds, I mustered my troops …and explained the game. Its a large scale version of rock, paper and scissors, and it involves some intellectual decision making. But the real purpose of the game is to make a lot of

noise and run around chasing people until no one knows what side they're on or who won.

Organizing a roomfull of wired-upgrade schoolers into two teams, explaining the rudiments of the game, and achieving a consensus of group identity -all this is no mean accomplishment, but we did it with right good will and were ready to go.

The excitement of the chase had reached a critical mass. I yelled out, "You have to decide *now* which you are. A GIANT, a WIZARD, or a DRAWF!"

While the group huddles in a frenzied whispered consultation, a tug comes at my pants leg. A small child stands there looking up, and asks in a small, concerned voice, "Where do the mermaids stand?"

Where do the mermaids stand?

A long pause. A *very* long pause. "Where do the mermaids stand?" says I.

"Yes. You see, I am a Mermaid."

"There are no such things as mermaids."

"Oh yes! I am one."

She did not relate to being a giant, a wizard, or a dwarf. She knew her category. Mermaid. And was not about to leave the game and go over and stand against the wall where a loser would stand. She intended to participate wherever Mermaids fit into the scheme of things. Without giving up dignity or identity. She took it for granted

that there was a place for Mermaids and that I would know just where.

Well where DO mermaids stand? All the "Mermaids" - all those who are different, who do not fit the norm and who do not accept the available boxes and pigeonholes?

Answer that question and you can build a school, a nation, or a world on it.

What was my answer at the moment? Every once in a while, I say the right thing. "The mermaids stand right here by the king of the sea!" says I. (Yes, right here by the King's Fool, I thought to myself.)

So we stand there hand in hand, reviewing the troops of the Wizards and Giants and Dwarfs as they roiled by in wild disarray.
It is not true, by the way, that mermaids do not exist. I know at least one personally. I have held her hand. (R. Fulghum, 1988, pp. 81-83)

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW FORMAT

This research is centered on the broad question: What is the nature of exceptional teaching practice? To determine even a partial answer to this general question three specific sub-questions must be asked.

A. What do exemplary teachers believe about education, teaching, students as human beings, school setting, and the student-teacher relationship?

Possible questions to direct participants to answer this question may include:

1. Is education important to everyone?

2. Do you believe that your profession is important? Why?

3. What rights and responsibilities do students have in terms of their education?

4. Should students be treated as individuals? Why or why not?

5. What can be done to make sure education is equitable for everyone? Explain.

6. Do your students influence you? Do you influence your students? Explain.

B. What actions and interactions do exemplary teachers use when teaching?

Possible questions to direct participants to answer this question may include:

1. How do you go about teaching? What conscious choices do you make to ensure you are meeting the needs of all your students?

2. How does your teaching style reflect your goals?

3. Does your teaching style remain constant or do you alter your style depending on circumstances? Explain.

C. What are the effects of these actions and interactions?

Possible questions to direct participants to answer this question may include:

1. What impact does your teaching style have on your students? Their families? You? Explain.

APPENDIX B

LETTER INVITING NOMINATIONS FOR THE STUDY

My name is Beverley Crossman and I am currently on educational leave. I am studying Educational Administration at the University of Alberta pursuing a Master of Education degree.

Recently, inclusion of special needs children has been emphasized in programming for individual differences. Although there is movement towards inclusive education within the district, integrating special needs children into regular classrooms is a very complex and difficult task. Clearly, the classroom teacher is a catalyst in the success or failure of the program. Many teachers are very capable and offer excellent programming to regular students in the regular classroom. However, when many of these capable teachers are asked to include special needs children in their classrooms, they do not experience the same degree of success. Therefore, the question my research will ask is: What are the characteristics of exemplary teachers who successfully integrate mild to moderate learning disabled students into regular classrooms so that these students experience positive social, emotional, and academic growth? For the purpose of this study we will include teachers at the elementary level.

The initial step in this research process is the identification of those **exemplary teachers**. Please print in the space below one or two names of teachers you feel are exemplary, who are presently mainstreaming mild to moderate learning disabled students into regular classrooms. To clarify what is mean by "exemplary," consider those teachers you would want to have teaching your child if he or she was classified as a mild to moderate learning disabled student. Nominations should include teachers you feel are **exemplary** and the school they are presently teaching at. You are not limited to nominating teachers from your present school, but may include the name or names of individuals teaching at the elementary level in the school district.

It is important that you complete your list independently without consulting your colleagues. Once your list is complete please seal it in the envelop provided and return it to the principal who will forward all replies to me unopened.

I will be compiling a list of all teachers nominated from various schools in the district. From this list, volunteers will be solicited until five exemplary teachers are identified as participants. All names will be kept in reserve should more participants be needed.

Thank you for your assistance. I hope that through a combination of interviews, observations and narrative exchanges with teachers nominated by their peers as being exemplary, an increased understanding of mainstreaming special needs students into regular classrooms will emerge.

Beverley Crossman

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NOMINATIONS OF EXEMPLARY TEACHERS
MAINSTREAMING SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS
INTO REGULAR CLASSROOMS

1. _____ **2.** _____

APPENDIX C

INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS REGARDING NOMINATIONS FOR THE STUDY

Dear _____:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the nomination process for my research. The study of the characteristics of exemplary teachers mainstreaming mild to moderate learning disabled students into regular classrooms should prove to be informative and practical. I am anxious to begin my research.

Until then there are a number of bureaucratic "hoops" to jump through. An important one is the peer nomination process. Please find enclosed, four copies of the "Letter Inviting Nominations for the Study." As was mentioned on the telephone, kindly complete a nomination form yourself, and have three teachers on your staff complete the remaining nomination forms. Please return the completed nomination forms in the self-addressed stamped envelop to me as soon as possible so that I may begin the process of soliciting four exemplary teachers for the study.

Twelve schools will participate in the nomination process, but not all schools will have staff participating in the main study. I will advise you as soon as the four volunteers have been selected.

I cannot thank you enough for your involvement in my study. Without cooperation from schools such as yours, research of this nature would not get done.

Sincerely,

Beverley Crossman

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION

A Study of Exemplary Teachers Mainstreaming Mild to Moderate Learning Disabled Students into Regular Classrooms

I acknowledge that this research project has been explained to me and that any pertinent questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that Beverley Crossman will answer any additional questions that I have about the research project.

I understand that participation in the study is completely voluntary and that I will receive no remuneration for the time spent working on this project outside of my normal work hours. I understand that the study will involve observational time, interviews, and narrative exchanges. Should I decide to participate, and later decide to withdraw from the study, I may do so at any time without penalty.

I understand that I will receive a copy of this signed consent form. I also understand that the report of this study will be a public document, but I have been assured that my confidentiality will be respected.

_____	_____
Name of Participant (Please Print)	Signature of Participant
Beverley Crossman_____	_____
Name of Investigator	Signature of Investigator
_____	
Date	